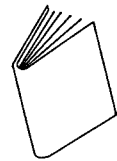


THE OTHER BOOK

Bewilderments of Fiction | Jordan Stump



Stages

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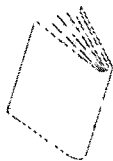
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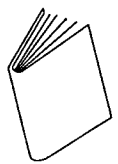
RAYMOND QUENEAU, *Chêne et chien*



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INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH IT'S BEEN PURE AGONY ever since, this book began in a moment of bliss. As part of my research for an earlier study, I had gone to the Centre de documentation Raymond Queneau in Verviers, Belgium, to look through Queneau's manuscripts; I didn't quite know what I was hoping to find in those pages, but I fully expected to find *something*, some bouquet of citations that would prove useful for my project, and so I did. There is much in Queneau's manuscripts that can be put to constructive interpretive use—variants, outlines, and notes from the author to himself, for instance, very convenient for supporting or enlivening one's interpretations—but my moment of bliss had little to do with such scholarly aims. Rather, what filled me with joy were the hours I spent lost in a far less productive pursuit, a jubilant immersion in manuscript passages not really related to what I was looking for, passages that depart in some significant way from the substance of a given novel as it was finally published, pages devoted to episodes that do not actually occur in the text, or that occur so differently as to constitute an entirely different sort of event. It's a dizzying experience: you turn a page, innocently you begin to read, and all at once you find yourself in a world unknown, recognizable as belonging to the novel but at the same time alien

to it, and suddenly it's just as if you were reading the novel itself, laughing and marveling like the very first time. Nothing could be more wrong than to spurn that delight in the name of dispassionate analysis, and so I gave myself over unreservedly to the experience, reading these pages just as I might read any novel, purely for the joy of it, for the delight of seeing things happen, of hearing a voice that speaks to me, of losing myself. And lose myself I did, for hours at a time.

Whatever useful knowledge came from my stay in Verviers, it is those pages that I remember most fondly, for two reasons. First, they offered me "more Queneau" to read. I thought I'd seen all there was to see of his novels, but no: there was, I now happily discovered, *more*, and for a fan of Queneau that can only come as tremendously welcome news. More than that, however, I was elated by the teasingly different view of Queneau's novels that these manuscript pages gave me. I thought I knew what happened in those books, who the characters were, what they did, but here I found *other* things happening, the familiar characters still recognizable but changed, their actions sometimes troublingly out of character, and this filled me with gleeful perplexity.

In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, Georges Perec writes movingly of the joy of rereading, of returning to Dumas's *Vingt ans après*, for instance, to find that the remembered details are still "just where they belong" (192), that the world (of the novel, and perhaps beyond) hasn't changed, that stability and permanence are still, after all, possible. Perec has his own overpowering reasons for longing after that permanence, of course, but I'm convinced that the joy he describes here is universal. Equally universal, however, and equally heady, is that sort of joy's precise opposite, the joy of seeing a world we think we know and finding it changed, unfamiliar, somewhat unsettling. I often dream I've found a room in my house

that I'd never noticed before; this discovery, and the subsequent exploration, fill me with fascinated happiness. I felt the same powerful emotions on discovering those unexpected manuscript passages. Encountering a book I loved with the remembered details *not* "just where they belong" gave me a palpable shock, and with it a frisson of exultant delight.

And perhaps more than delight. Imagine you have a very good friend, one whom you think you know so well that nothing he or she might do could possibly surprise you. Now imagine that you were somehow given the secret power to observe this friend's actions even when you're apart, and that you found him or her performing actions unlike those your long acquaintance has led you to expect—not shocking actions, necessarily, but simply different ones. That insight would surely affect you in some way: you might be glad to find your friend more complicated than you thought, you might think yourself forced to rethink your understanding of him or her entirely. You may well be moved by this opportunity to know your friend better than you thought you did, or you may be troubled. In any case, I think you would find it supremely difficult to look away, and impossible simply to discard your newfound knowledge. It would *mean* something to you, and you may conclude that you now know this person better than you once did, that you have learned something about your friend from this glimpse into his or her un-public life.

That was my experience in reading these manuscript passages: to see Pierrot or Astolphe or Étienne Marcel doing things I "didn't know" they did filled me with a sort of illicit, voyeuristic joy, to begin with, and at the same time gave me, however illusorily, the impression that I'd acquired some new understanding of their nature. The novels show us one side of their being, but now I had seen the other, their unofficial, unauthorized doings. Again, there

was nothing shocking in those deeds; they were simply fascinatingly different from the acts narrated in the novels, fascinating perhaps merely *because* they were different. Nor did the information to be gleaned from those pages necessarily have any practical value. There were times when I was convinced I'd discovered some usable meaning there, but often I could see no way to *interpret* what I was reading. It didn't really need interpreting: an event not found in the novel was to my mind intriguing and revelatory simply by virtue of its existence, simply by its power to stretch the walls of what I'd once considered a finite world. But no matter what the passage offered me—the solution to an enigma or merely a glimpse of an unknown reality—my reaction was the same: I found in its words and images something to be reveled in.

But even as I reveled I knew I was wrong to be doing so, that my pleasure was by any standards a theoretically dubious one. I understood that the characters we meet in a novel must not be mistaken for real people, and hence that we really should feel no illicit thrill when we see them do something uncharacteristic in a discarded manuscript passage. We certainly shouldn't conclude that we've caught a deeper glimpse of their existence: as L. C. Knights warned us long ago in his essay "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth," they *have* no existence outside the words of the text, and it is both idle and foolish to wonder, for instance, how a character of *Henry V* might have learned French (16). I knew, too, that—to use Raymonde Debray-Genette's terms—we mustn't confuse the finiteness of the text with finishedness or finality (20), that there's nothing sacred or even definitive about the published novel, that the final version is only a final version, not a statement of absolute truth, so the differences of the earlier drafts can't be read as a challenge to or transgression of that truth. I knew all this, I knew it full well, and if ever I forgot it I had only to speak to one or another of my colleagues. I had only to tell them of the joy I'd

found in those manuscripts, and of my happy surprise at witnessing events I'd never seen happen in the book itself: they would patiently hear me out, nodding amiably all the while, but displaying nothing like the enthusiasm I was expecting. They seemed to find nothing extraordinary in those events, nor in the experience of reading them. To my dismay, they seemed almost to take all this for granted. They'd seen such things before and viewed them simply as the rather banal phenomenon of textual genetics that they are.

Clearly, my euphoria was not only theoretically invalid but incommunicable. This irked me considerably until I realized that the difference between my reaction and my colleagues' stemmed merely from two different approaches to the mysterious task of reading. My colleagues apparently looked on the text with a detached sort of gaze, as if from a distance: they were seeing the text as an act of language, studiable and describable, but not to be confused with a reality whose underpinnings can be shaken by the disclosure that its events were once different from what they now are. If this is how we read, we may see the manuscript as an indication of how the novel came to be written, but not as a disruption or complication of the book's world. I, on the other hand, seemed to read from a far more involved standpoint, perhaps more childishly, seeing the events and characters of the novel as in some sense *real*, as things that exist or happen, for only if that's how we read can a glimpse of those events or characters in an unfamiliar form be surprising or troubling. These two ways of reading are by no means mutually exclusive, of course: surely the detached observer of a text might still be heard speaking of and delighting in "what happens" in it, and surely even the most involved reader realizes that the book's illusory world derives purely from an assemblage of words. Nevertheless, they remain two different modes of reading, essentially distinct, and productive of two different

experiences. Discounting the possibility that my way was simply the wrong way, I thus came to understand that a consideration of the coexistence of a manuscript and a definitive text could, at the very least, pose certain questions concerning the ways in which people read, in which they conceive of a work of fiction, in which a work of fiction exists. Reading those manuscript passages, in other words, ultimately revealed the existence of a question (how do people read events in novels?) that had not quite occurred to me before, and one with a great many implications—and this, I thought, deserved to be thought about a bit longer.

Thoughts such as that filled my mind for some time after reading the manuscripts, but they were forced to compete for space with preoccupations of a very different order, arising from my immersion in the pleasures and travails of literary translation. I've been translating from French since the first days of my professorial career, simply because I love it, because it allows me to read with a particular kind of closeness, and because it allows me, in my own modest way, to create. In all honesty, I see translation less as an intellectual undertaking than as an aesthetic one; nevertheless, a translator has no choice, from the first word to the last, but to grapple with a fundamental, insistent question of literary theory, that of the relation between the words of the text and its sense or effect. Given that a translation can never be the same text as the original, but must always strive to be just that, the translator is at every moment forced to ponder what exactly constitutes sameness and difference, what happens to the novel when it is altered in some way, and so how to define its fundamental nature. And how to define the reader's experience as well, how to create a text that will produce the intended experience, how the reader can be expected to read, how indeed the reader of the original reads. And so on and so forth: whatever other pleasures the task of translation might

offer, it necessarily involves a theoretical reflection on the being of the text, an awareness and a questioning of its definability.

And here an obvious link suggests itself: neither a manuscript nor a translation is precisely the same thing as the book itself, but each has a certain relationship with that book, all the same. The manuscript and the translation are both *close to* the book, and at the same time somewhat distant: just distant enough to create a kind of friction when the two are allowed to rub up against each other. The manuscripts force us to ask certain questions concerning our conception of the novel's events (and to wonder what becomes of the novel if we think of it as potentially marked by other events), and the translation obliges us to consider our conception of the novel's words (and to wonder what becomes of the novel if we see it composed of other words). The manuscript and the translation thus have a similar sort of relationship with the book itself, and this realization allowed me to think of another such case, another form in which a book can exist, with its own necessary differences and similarities: the critical edition, whose annotations, variants, and careful contextualization of the text create another distance from the book itself, even as that edition faithfully reproduces every element of the original text's makeup. As with a manuscript or a translation, to read a critical edition is not exactly to read the book itself. It is to read the book itself *plus something else*, shall we say, something intimately connected to the book itself and at the same time external to it. And as with a manuscript or a translation, the friction between the book itself and this version of it cannot fail to spark questions—to make us wonder, for instance, just what to do with that supplementary material, what assumptions about the text or about reading underlie its inclusion, what becomes of the novel if we come to it with or without the kind of knowledge the critical edition offers, and generally what role knowledge and ignorance play in our apprehension of the text.

The reader will no doubt have noticed the frequency with which I use the expression "the book itself" in the preceding lines; I do so knowing that the phrase is an ambiguous one (but whose sense I think we can all intuitively agree upon, for the moment: the book itself is the text of which the manuscript and the translation are different versions, and which the critical edition reproduces amid the supplementary material it offers). I use that ambiguous phrase because I need it in order to explain the next step in my conception of the present study: if manuscripts, translations, and critical editions all reveal a certain difference from the text to which they are linked, the same must be true of the simple *copy* of that book. There's nothing abstruse about this idea. In our everyday language we make a distinction between, say, *Madame Bovary* and a copy of *Madame Bovary*, and this distinction obviously suggests that we see some sort of difference between the two. But what sort of difference? Of course, we need hardly consider that question, or even see that difference, when we are reading or discussing *Madame Bovary*, and yet the difference remains, complex and slightly uncomfortable, and here too the friction between the book itself and the copy of that book raises questions, once again concerning the nature of the text's existence, and indeed the very possibility or impossibility of defining it.

The subject of this book, then, is four different forms of one novel, and the questions posed by the relationship of that novel (that "book itself") with these four versions of it (these "other books"). I hope the sense of the latter expression is clear: like "the book itself," I use it here precisely because it's ambiguous. The other book is the version of the book itself, a manifestation of the book itself—its alter ego, perhaps, or its dizygotic twin. In this way the other book departs from Gérard Genette's paratext: it is less "that by which a text constitutes itself as a book and offers itself as such to its readers" (*Seuils* 7) than an alternative form

of the text, something that could (and from another point of view could not) be read as the text. Nor is the other book the kind of "literature in the second degree" that Genette studies in *Palimpsestes*: these other books do not transform the book itself, but stand in for it, to varying degrees. The other book is not exactly other than the book itself, but neither is it the same; perhaps we should say that the other book is the book itself marked, to greater or lesser degree, by otherness. In its most unpredictable form (the manuscript), the other book can vary wildly from the book itself; in its most minimal state (the copy), the two might seem indistinguishable—but even there a palpable difference can be made out, if we are prepared to see it.

Now, if the category of the other book is so vast as to include even a mere copy of a book, then it must seem that *every* book is in some sense an other book. This is no doubt true, but I'm not sure it tells us anything much, in the end, and proving that point is not really my goal. Rather, my purpose here is to study the problems raised by the curious relationships of these other books to the book itself, and to consider a number of solutions that have been proposed for those problems. As I said earlier on, there is always a kind of friction between the book itself and the other book, and if we will allow it, that friction can be a productive one; the sparks it throws off can illuminate, however dimly, certain small patches of a work of literature's existence that may well have remained in the dark otherwise. That's what made me want to write this book. For reasons of internal coherency, I've chosen to ground this discussion in a single text, Raymond Queneau's *Le chiendent*. However, I should say from the outset—perhaps this is already clear—that the following pages do not mean to offer an interpretation of Queneau's novel, or mean to do so only in the most indirect way. That is, I seek not to discuss the sense of this book but to consider the implications of the various forms it takes. There are of course a

great many books that take other forms like those I will discuss here; in that sense, my remarks on *Le chiendent* could no doubt be applied to any book at all, for my real subject is the nature of fiction and reading.

This is not to say that my choice of *Le chiendent* is an arbitrary one. For one thing, *Le chiendent* is a novel I deeply love, which to my mind will always be reason enough. For another, *Le chiendent* is a novel entirely preoccupied with questions of ontology, of interpretation and misinterpretation, of language, and of knowledge and ignorance—the very questions I intend to ask with respect to the other book. Finally, and most importantly, *Le chiendent* approaches those questions with a kind of ludic intelligence that I deeply admire and that has shaped, obliquely, many of the ideas I intend to propose here. And one in particular: the importance of looking in the wrong direction.

The characters of Queneau's novel are all, to some extent, spies or voyeurs. Think, for instance, of the "observer" scrutinizing the employees of the Comptoir des Comptes, Narcense ogling Alberte while he himself is being watched by Théo, Clovis tailing Pierre and Étienne at X..., Hippolyte surreptitiously studying Narcense's face so as to provide the police with his description should the need arise, and so on and so on (there really are hundreds of examples). And in so many of these cases the characters are looking where, by one definition or another, they're not supposed to be looking: Le Grand has no reason to be interested in the employees of Étienne's bank, Narcense shouldn't covet another man's wife, and so forth. For that matter, this phenomenon of looking at things from outside—and particularly at what shouldn't or needn't be looked at—is the very source of the novel's primal scene, the sight that sets the whole thing in motion, Étienne's discovery of a puzzling display in a shop window, and hence his initiation to reflective thought. It is precisely because he turns his head one

day and gazes at what he is not supposed to look at (because the contemplation of the rubber ducks requires him to diverge from the most efficient route from office to subway (OC 2: 6) that he abruptly comes to see the world differently, and, it would seem, more fully. This moment of revelation is repeated in various forms throughout his development: forced to take a later train than his usual, he notices that "the seven o'clock commuters make up a world unknown to the six o'clock commuters" (11), and observes the differences with evident interest; looking at the kitchen gadgets as they are not supposed to be looked at (ignoring their utilitarian purpose), he finds himself unaccountably fascinated. One of the primary ideas of the novel, then, is that looking at the familiar with unfamiliar eyes can lead to great discoveries, though it can of course also lead to absurd mistakes (Mme Cloche looks at Taupe that way, and wrongly concludes that he is no pauper but a miserly millionaire). In any case, it is clear to Étienne that this new vision is central to an understanding of the world, no matter how disorienting the revelations it brings: "the world isn't what it seems to be, at least when you go through the same thing every day then you don't see anything . . . all I have to do is look like this, sideways you might say, and then I'm outside of it" (65–66). It is enough, then, for Étienne to have turned his head to the right rather than look straight ahead, to look wrongly—"sideways"—rather than rightly, and everything changes.

This is precisely the experience I recognize from my reading of the manuscripts: I'd read *Le chiendent* so many times that I thought I knew it, so many times that in a sense I was no longer seeing it. Like Étienne, I followed my regular course (office to home for him, first page to last for me); like him, I one day turned my eyes in a different direction, and found my habits productively upset. Like Étienne, I happened to see something (a book, in my case) "sideways," and at that moment something changed for me.

It should be said that in the end Étienne's discovery is not an entirely useful one: he sees things differently but not necessarily more truthfully than he did before. He discovers that the staircase in a Parisian subway station has forty-seven steps, like the train station in Obonne; this realization leads him to the conclusion that "the world is big and fearsome, full of mysteries and even, more precisely, of teasing little secrets" (42), but neither he nor we have any way of knowing that this realization is valid (does that equivalence mean something? *could* it mean something? something banal or something mysterious? how would we ever know?). Little surprise, then, that the ultimate effect of Étienne's epiphany is simply a slide into skepticism, a realization not of what he could know but of how little he does know, and of the very impossibility of knowing: "I was saying that even a cigarette butt, there's no way of knowing what it is. I don't know what it is! I don't know! I DON'T KNOW!" (123). For Pierre Le Grand, Étienne's skepticism represents a "dangerous obstacle to his meditations" (136), but I'm not sure I agree. Had Étienne *remained* skeptical, he would never have fallen prey to the illusion of a putative treasure behind Taupé's door, and he would have been entirely correct in his assumption that none of the events going on around him are entirely real. In the end, Étienne's professed ignorance seems to me an entirely reasonable reaction to the incomprehensible world of this novel, and the closest one can come to an understanding of it.

My own encounter with these other *Chiendents* follows Étienne's experience on this score as well: what I discovered from these readings was a series of questions about the novel that I don't believe it is possible to answer. Like Étienne's, my skepticism is not a comfortable one, for it seems to me at the same time that these are questions that *must* be answerable; it's simply that the answer is unknowable. "[D]o the words *to be* have a meaning?" Étienne wonders (124), and what is particularly damnable about

that question is that it necessarily has an answer (the word does have a meaning or it doesn't, or some variation thereon), and at the same time that answer is perfectly unreachable. So it goes with the questions posed by the texts I mean to study here: they are real questions, as is the one just posed by Étienne, but like that question they can only remain as questions, with answers both necessary and impossible.

Of course, one can live a rich and happy life without once wondering if there is some meaning to the verb "to be," just as it is possible to feel nothing whatsoever on sighting a handful of rubber ducks floating in a waterproof hat. Such is the case with Théo: "That thing's been there for two years at least" (9), he tells his father on hearing his befuddled account of the display. Théo has seen the ducks before, and they mean little to him: they are simply *there*. Étienne takes this to mean that Théo has a superior understanding of the world around him ("for Théo . . . [the ducks] were just there, right from the start, easy as pie, Théo could see that" [66]), but again I don't believe I can agree: Théo may have observed that the ducks were there, may have seen what Étienne failed to see, but at the same time Théo has not really *seen* much of anything. He seems to view that mildly strange sight simply as part of the natural order of things, evocative of nothing, leading nowhere. For his part, Étienne is by no means blind to the utilitarian nature of the display; he knows that the ducks are there "to prove, you know, to show," that the hat is indeed waterproof (9), but this practical understanding does not prevent him from considering the display "very curious" (9), and from finding his own view of the world changed by it.

Similarly, it is possible to look at the novel's manuscripts, for instance, and to say, a bit like Théo, "those have been there all along," meaning that they are part of the natural order of things (novels have manuscripts: so what?), just as it is possible to look

at a copy or a translation or a critical edition and see it as the simply convenient, thoroughly un-uncanny object that it is. A novel needn't be read in the context of these other books, thank goodness, and if we didn't see manuscripts and translations and critical editions as perfectly dispensable, then reading novels would be a far more arduous and less pleasurable thing than it is. It is in short quite possible to argue that these other books simply don't matter, and I would be the first to agree. But I find it equally possible to refuse to dismiss them, as Étienne refuses (or finds himself unable) to dismiss the sight of the ducks; in that case, the strange questions that arise need not be neglected either. It should be possible to look at those other books and to marvel at all that is strange about them, just as Étienne does with the ducks, in full knowledge of the fact that (in one sense, but one sense only) they serve a purpose that is not really curious at all.

Such at least is the approach I intend to offer here, resolutely neglecting any reading that studies these other books' practical side. A manuscript can be read as evidence of the novel's genesis, a copy as a way of talking about the history of a novel's publication, a critical edition as an element of its reception, a translation as an evaluation of the translator's work: however vital those questions may be, none of that interests me here. I want to read them as Étienne scrutinizes the egg-slicer, for instance, neglecting the object's practical value in order to see all the strangeness it embodies. Étienne himself sometimes wonders what the purpose of such a pursuit might be. In the course of one of their conversations at X..., he asks Pierre what he is doing "[i]f I neglect the practical side of a man-made object," and Pierre replies that in that case "You're engaged in aesthetics. . . . Or magic" (104)—an elegant answer, but a very partial one. A study of the metallic composition of the blades of an egg-slicer, for instance, is neither aesthetics nor magic; it's simply *looking*, perhaps spying (because

looking at what needn't be seen, what isn't supposed to be taken into account as one uses the device). That is the tactic I intend to use here, but my goal is in a sense the opposite of the scientist's: what I am after is not knowledge but an understanding of a certain impossibility of knowledge, of the ultimate necessary failure of knowledge where fiction is concerned, and of the beauty of that failure's inevitability.

Étienne's discovery that it is possible to look at the world as it shouldn't be looked at is one inspiration for the kind of reading I intend to do here; Saturnin's handmade approach to the study of unanswerable questions is another. In the dogged, brilliant, untutored philosophical disquisition he offers us in the last section of chapter 6, Saturnin takes on a heavyweight question—the nature of being and nothingness—in a way that I find profoundly admirable, and even exemplary. For one thing, Saturnin considers that age-old question purely by way of his own nimble imaginings, unconstrained by the thoughts of philosophers who came before him. For another, his considerations show no fear of the absurd. He seems to understand that the absurd might be a necessary by-product of the search for truth; perhaps, for that matter, it is the truth itself. Too, he allows his search for the sense of the coexistence of being and nonbeing to remain a profoundly inconclusive one, and his failure to find a final answer to the riddle, even after having methodically considered all the possible permutations of their relationship, strikes me as the best possible outcome for any philosophical or theoretical consideration. Saturnin's discussion is particularly useful in that, even as it relentlessly uncovers all that cannot be known of the world, it refuses to fall into the comfortably complacent trap of concluding that the world is simply unknowable. It is just as true, he tells us, that "What is is, what isn't isn't" as it is that "What is isn't, what isn't is," that "What is is, what isn't is," and that "What is isn't, what isn't isn't" (215); but

the fact that these four permutations do not, individually or collectively, offer access to a real truth does not mean that there is no such thing as truth, nor that the truth is a thing that by definition cannot be found. It is simply, as he concludes, "somewhere else" (216).

In other words, objective truth exists to the same degree that it is impossible. Faced with that sort of paradox, the temptation of the human mind is to come down in favor of one or the other of the two terms, to claim that either objective or subjective truth is the only kind there is. Various critical schools of thought espouse one or the other of these principles, and here is where I find Saturnin's approach a healthy corrective. Real truth both exists and cannot exist, he says. And indeed, this is precisely what I would like to show about fiction: looked at closely, its existence is impossible, which is not to say that it does not exist. In fiction's perfect coalescence of being and impossibility of being I find something profoundly lovely, something to marvel at, which is perhaps the final reason why I find Saturnin's discussion so enchanting: given a philosophical question, he seeks not to find a satisfactory answer but simply to wonder, with genuine enthusiasm, at the strangeness of the notions that question can give rise to, as if he found that strangeness in the end far more appealing, and the discovery of that strangeness far more exciting, than any conclusion.

And *my* conclusion, I must warn the reader from the start, will be identical to Saturnin's.

But before I can conclude I must begin, and before I can begin I must offer up a few words of gratitude. Thanks, then, to Jean-Marie and Anne Isabelle-Queneau, for graciously allowing me to cite the manuscripts of *Le chiendent*; to Suzanne Bagoly-Meyer of the Centre Queneau in Verviers, for good turns too numerous to mention; to Warren Motte and Gerald Prince, for their unfailingly

helpful advice; to Jonathan Lawrence, for his astute and sensitive copyediting; to Ladette Randolph, Daniel Delbreil, and Éric Chevillard, for words of encouragement at opportune times; and most of all to Eleanor Hardin, for absolutely everything.

A note, too, on the citations. For accessibility's sake, all quotations of primary and secondary sources appear here in English; if the text cited is a foreign one, and if the corresponding entry in the Works Cited does not list a translator, the translation is my own. As a general rule, quotations of *Le chiendent* are drawn from volume 2 of Queneau's complete works in the Pléiade edition (marked *OC* 2 in parenthetical references); references to the Folio edition will be marked as such. However, from page 144 to the end of chapter 3, quotations from Queneau's novel refer (unless otherwise indicated) to Barbara Wright's translation, published in 2003 as *Witch Grass* and marked, when necessary, *WG*. Quotations from the Centre de documentation Raymond Queneau's manuscript collection will be marked *CDRQ*; the *cl.* that follows those letters refers to the *classeur* (file folder) in which the relevant page can be found.

I COPY

LET ME BEGIN BY ASSURING YOU that I have read Raymond Queneau's novel *Le chiendent*. A strange thing to say, perhaps, but every interpretation of this work—and of any other, of course, *mutatis mutandis*—must begin with that simple claim. In a work of literary criticism, this affirmation no doubt goes without saying (I would never dream of opening a serious scholarly study with those words); still, explicit or implicit, the affirmation must be there, masking, in its obviousness, the oddly refractory question of what it is referring to. When I say "*Le chiendent*," what am I talking about? "The book, the text," might come the impatient reply, but I'm not sure much is gained by replacing one shorthand term for the object with another. More meaningful than this response itself, then, is the dismissive tone in which I think it would likely be delivered, for that irritation eloquently expresses a manifest truth: we take the notion of "what the text is" essentially for granted. And there's no reason why we shouldn't; if we've read the book, we *know* what it is, and no doubt we have more important questions to ponder than that. Still, a question does not cease to exist merely because it needn't be posed, and I'd like to pose it now, as a beginning, because I believe that the curiously difficult problem of defining what the text is offers us a first, and

fundamental, notion of this or any novel's strange existence—and the strangeness of a novel's existence is precisely what I hope to show in these pages.

To that end, let's try a small experiment. If I say to you "*Le chiendent*" (or the title of any other novel you've read, of course), you will find flooding into your mind a certain idea or notion, a certain vision or understanding or conception. Think for a moment: what do you see? Probably not a specific collection of words, although a few of the novel's phrases or stylistic mannerisms may pop into your mind after a moment. Nor, I would venture to guess, a particular bound volume, though that image too may materialize at some point, by association (in my case, I do eventually see the image of my own battered paperback copy, but only eventually). Nor, I think, will your first thought be of a *generic* volume, a sort of default mental picture of *Le chiendent*-the-published-book, though once again you may at some point conjure up such an image (I can easily see the book with the standard Gallimard cover, but that's not the first impression that comes to me). What I first think of, and what I would venture to guess you first think of as well, is something that can't exactly be pictured, and can only partially be described. It's a sort of global apperception, half seen, half sensed, of a string—longer or shorter, more or less fragmented or continuous—of events: in the case of this particular novel, Étienne and the rubber ducks, his visit to the *friterie*, Ernestine's death, the Gallo-Etruscan war, and so on, in no particular order, perhaps even all at the same time. Along with those events, far more vaguely, I sense the way in which they are told to us—not so much the words used to narrate them as the tone underlying those words, the narrator's attitude, the novel's ironic stance. On hearing or speaking that title, then, I have in my mind a sort of essence-of-*Le chiendent*: a set of actions, a certain atmosphere, a certain tone, everything (but in a sketchy form, partial, as if min-

iaturized) that I have experienced in reading the novel, a quick compendium of things that make that book what it is, independent of the text's actual words and of any image of that work as a published volume, real or imaginary. In other words, the image I summon up on hearing that title is not exactly *a book*, nor a set of sentences, but rather a certain number of things that happen, and the manner in which those events are conveyed to us.

Of course, the idea that one reader will summon up may well differ from the next reader's, and for that matter my own idea of *Le chiendent* might not be the same every time I think of it. What matters is not the specific idea evoked by that title, but the *kind* of idea. That image, that global vision of *Le chiendent* as a series of events and effects, suggests that we think of a novel as a quality or a force or a state or a sequence that is essentially singular: as something that happened, or happens, like any event from real life. *Le chiendent* is thus an entity that can exist in a number of different forms (the different editions we've read, and even those we haven't, but also translations, for instance, and also various experiences of reading the novel at various times in our lives), and yet the existence of these different forms does not really affect our *idea* of the novel. It remains identifiably *Le chiendent*, because those different forms are in fact exterior to its being or essence. As is, for that matter, our own reading of the novel, for what I picture on hearing the words "*Le chiendent*" is not myself reading that book but rather the facts of that book simply being there, as if our reading of those facts involved our coming to them, and not our creating them. (To be sure, I am no doubt picturing the *Chiendent* that I created when I read it; nevertheless, I repeat that what I see is not myself creating it, but rather it being there, as if its existence did not exactly or not entirely depend on my creation of it.) *Madame Bovary*, *La nausée*, *La vie mode d'emploi*, any novel at all: we picture them existing as notions or creations or entities,

each of them singular. What we picture in our minds is *Madame Bovary*—in general, in its actions and in its effects—and not one particular exemplar of *Madame Bovary*, and certainly not hundreds of thousands of them. We see *Madame Bovary* as one thing, vast enough that we can pull different things from it at different times, but nevertheless containing all those multiple things within one singular essence.

That image we conjure up when we hear the name of a novel is a glimpse of what in the preceding pages I have called “the book itself”—not the book itself *itself*, but only a fleeting and partial mental picture of it. It takes the form of a series of events and effects solely because it is easier for us to picture the complexities of a long novel in that way. If I were to name for you a much shorter work—William Carlos Williams’s “The Red Wheelbarrow,” for instance, or Apollinaire’s “Chantre”—you may well find yourself mentally reciting the entire text of the poem, with every word in place: the poem itself, in short. If our memories were much better than they are, or novels much shorter, perhaps we would do the same thing on hearing the name of a novel; but in this world, memories are short and novels are long, happily, and so we conjure up for ourselves a brief digest of the text, a partial composite by which to encapsulate the whole. Still, whether the text evoked is a very short poem or a very long novel, the fundamental nature of our notion is the same: an image of the text that assumes there is such a thing as “the text,” something with an objective existence (words I have memorized, or events I remember seeing), and indeed a *singular* objective existence. The ability to summon up that image rests on the assumption that *there is a thing that is* “The Red Wheelbarrow” or *Le chiendent*, and it is important to note the singular article in those phrases: “there is a thing that is *Le chiendent*,” not “there are things that are *Le chiendent*.” That

singular thing is the book itself. The difficulty of defining that thing will be the subject of this chapter, but we can only begin to make our way toward that definition by considering something that is not exactly the thing in question.

I formulate an image of *Le chiendent*—of the book itself—on hearing that title because, as I say, I have read it. But what I mean when I claim to have read *Le chiendent* is more precisely that I have read a *copy* of it. Unless we are discussing a work that exists in only one instance (an unpublished text, say, available only in manuscript—but even there I believe that one exemplar would very likely be called “the only extant copy of the novel”), then any access we have to that book comes through a copy. It is a reading of the copy that produces our singular, objective, global image of the book itself, but that entity—the book itself—cannot exist, it would seem, in any form other than a copy, which by definition implies something multiple (copious). Thus, while we are surely not wrong to imagine the novel as a bounded, unique set of events and atmospheres, the fact that we can read it only in the form of a copy means that the novel also exists as something else, as something that can be reproduced. To begin with, then, the existence of the copy offers us a glimpse of a curious paradox in any novel’s mode of being: it is at once singular and multiple, and at once a set of events or effects (viewed, more or less subjectively, by the reader) and a set of words (existing in an entirely objective form: that is precisely why they can be copied).

Any novel thus possesses two modes of being: “the book itself,” the thing I mean when I say I have read *Le chiendent*, and the copy, the thing I have actually read. The two are not exactly interchangeable: “It is obviously wrong to say that *Ulysses* is my copy of it” (Wollheim 5), because *Ulysses* is a sort of model, and my copy only one reproduction of that model. Formulated in that way,

the distinction seems entirely clear, perhaps too clear to be wasting our time on here. The book sitting on my desk—the copy—is a physical object, and the book itself is not. A clear distinction, but not an entirely convincing one: it tells us what the book itself is not, but not what it is. And indeed, perhaps the distinction itself is illusory, for with a little thought it becomes evident that those two seemingly separate entities are in fact irritatingly inseparable. On the one hand, to say that I have read *Le chiendent* is always, necessarily, to say that I have read a copy of *Le chiendent* (the book itself can only exist as a copy of itself); on the other, the object sitting on my desk, even as it is simply a bound volume, a collection of pages with ink on them, somehow holds the very thing I mean when I speak of the book itself. But no sooner do I write that sentence than I wonder if “holds” is really the word I want. What *is* the right word? “Contains”? “Represents”? “Reproduces”? None of these feels right to me. Try as I might, I can’t come up with a word that expresses in what way the book itself is in the copy, and yet, manifestly, it is—otherwise I couldn’t say I’d read that book after reading the copy. If I can’t name what the copy does to the novel in any way that doesn’t sound absurd, it might be because there is no meaningful way to separate the copy from the novel. To my mind, it feels much more right, much closer to my experience as a reader, to say that the copy *is* the novel than to say that it *represents* it, or even that it *reproduces* it, even as I agree that the novel cannot be said to exist *solely* in my copy of it. At the very least, we should note that the distinction between the copy and the text is not as straightforward as it seemed a moment ago.

However muddled the argument, my point here is simple: the book itself and the copy are at once two things and precisely the same thing. The copy is at once external and central to the book’s existence, and the book is at once external and central to the copy’s existence. That simultaneous exteriority and centrality tells us that

there’s something about the copy that defies any *singular* understanding, something that confounds even an absurdly basic question like the one that follows.

WHAT IS A COPY?

The book on my desk is a copy of *Le chiendent*, I said, and if we want to determine what this means we must first understand the insufficiency of the question I’ve just posed, for there is not only one kind of copy in this world. We can use that word to refer to a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* or to an issue of the local newspaper, and surely we mean two different things by those two uses of the word. It takes only a little thought to see the difference: some copies, like a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, are irrevocably attached to a specific, overt original, and others, like the daily newspaper, are not.

The presence or absence of an original creates a division within the class of things called copies and determines the nature of the copies on either side of that rift. If there is an original, then a copy can only be a sort of stand-in for that original, and more or less necessarily a lesser realization of it. If there is one true original—the *Mona Lisa*, say—then any copy of that work cannot be the same thing as the work, and cannot be *real* in the way the original work is. A photograph of the *Mona Lisa*, for example, overtly distances itself from the original; by its very nature it tells us that what we are looking at is not the thing itself. This sort of copy can show us, however partially and imprecisely, what the painting looks like, but it is not simply interchangeable with the painting. At first glance, the case of a *painted* copy of a painting seems rather more ambiguous, not least because the copy might exist for a number of reasons: it might be a forgery, it might have been undertaken as an exercise by a student of painting, or it might have been created by an artist as a duplicate so that the work might

be displayed in more than one location (as David painted several copies of his *Napoleon Crossing the Alps at Mont Saint-Bernard*, for instance). But in fact the medium changes nothing in the first two cases. The relationship of the copy to the original is the same as with the photograph: the copy is not the original, whether the difference is visible on first sight or is only discernible to a specialist's eye. The copy pays homage to the original, and in so doing explicitly distances itself from it, telling us (or trying very hard to avoid telling us, which in this case comes to the same thing) that it is not the original. The third case, an artist's duplication of his or her own work, or indeed of someone else's (a Roman copy of a Greek sculpture, for instance) is less straightforward, for here the copy approaches the status of a work of art in itself. As with a photograph, we look at a Roman copy as an indication of what the original looked like, but surely the skill of the Roman sculptor must also enter into our appreciation of the piece, along with the historical circumstances of its creation. With an artist's recreation of his or her own work, we might seem to have come closer to a copy that is not really a copy at all: we can admire David's *Napoleon* as a David painting no matter where we happen to see it, at Malmaison or in Berlin, without wondering whether this is the original or not, just as we can enjoy a Duchamp ready-made knowing full well that it is *not* the original.

But even this latter sort of copy is marked by a certain distance and difference from its origin: it was created as a copy, not as an original. A Duchamp *Fontaine* of 1964 is not the object that caused such a fuss in 1917, and the David painting in Berlin is a picture of the canvas that now hangs in the Château de Malmaison. It may well make little difference to us, but an art historian will indeed distinguish between the two, with a sentence like "I will discuss only one version, considered to be the original painting, today at Malmaison" (Johnson 179). The later painting is not necessarily

lesser than the first, but it is nonetheless to be distinguished from it, simply because it's not the original. For the same reason, a Roman copy of a Greek sculpture will always be marked as such on its wall tag. Where there is a real original, a real "first one," a copy can never replace it, no matter its source, no matter how fine.

Is there then no copy that might truly stand in for the original? Imagine the world's greatest copy of a painting, a copy so perfect that its realization undoubtedly lies beyond human capacities, re-creating not only the overall look of the original but also the precise physical components of its creation. It would reproduce the artist's every last brushstroke, in the exact order in which they were made, using precisely the same sort of canvas, the same paints mixed in the same proportions, the same brushes held at the same angle and from the same height (meaning that the copyist would have to have the same physical proportions as the original artist, with hands shaped identically to his or hers, and muscles identically developed), and so on and so forth. Such a perfect copy would still fail to replace the original, in two ways: first, because like a student's copy it would recognize the existence of an original, which the original does not do, or because like David's *Napoleon* it is a picture of a picture of a thing, and not a picture of a thing; second, because it would constitute so remarkable a feat on the copyist's part, such astonishing mastery of his or her craft, that it would, I think, cease to speak of the original at all. No doubt it would draw a considerable crowd of gawkers, but what they would be admiring is not the accurate vision of the original that it provides but rather the breathtaking skill and superhuman study that lie behind its own creation. When there is an original, then, a copy is *always* an imperfect copy, and always distinct from the original. The reproduction of the Lascaux caverns that tourists visit today—a fine example of a perfect copy, meant to be equivalent to the original, and to seamlessly replace it in the

visitor's experience—is at once a reference to the original (this is what the original looks and feels like) and a palpable distancing from it (this isn't the real cave: if it were, you wouldn't be in it). In much the same way, a photocopy of an official document (like a transcript of a student's grades) says everything that the original says, and looks essentially identical to it, but cannot be used in its stead. Examples of this kind of copy are all around us, even if we don't use the word "copy" to evoke them: any snapshot, any image in a mirror . . .

But it is not at all difficult to imagine a case where the existence of the original has considerably less force, where the original can be so easily overlooked that it may seem there is none. Think, for instance, of a symphony: its variability (the different speeds at which it might be played, all the potentialities of an individual interpretation) is built into its being, which makes it, unlike the *Mona Lisa*, an inherently multiple creation. Its mutability is its point, and there is no original performance to which any other performance must refer. And yet, having made that claim, I find myself wondering just how true it is. Who would not want to hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as Beethoven himself might have conducted it? And who among us, were we granted the possibility of hearing that performance, could entirely banish from his or her mind the sense that this is in some sense a uniquely "real" version, precisely because it is the original, the symphony as Beethoven conceived it? In no way does this imply that every interpretation of the symphony should strive to emulate Beethoven's own; nevertheless, however fervently one may believe in the individual interpreter's freedom, I cannot imagine a music lover so ideologically pure as to see Beethoven's version as just one rendition among others. (I own a recording of *The Firebird* conducted by Stravinsky, and another conducted by Seiji Ozawa, and I wonder if the reason why I

prefer the former is simply that it is conducted by Stravinsky, and I further wonder if this is really so wrong—though I also wonder if I prefer the former only because I heard it first, which seems to me far less respectable.) Perhaps, then, a certain notion of the original haunts a musical performance in spite of its inherent multiplicity, so if what we are after is a copy free of the authority of origin we must look somewhere else: to the cinema, say. A commercially produced film exists in order to be multiple, in order to manifest itself in many multiplexes at once, and those many prints of the film are not lesser versions of the real film, but the film itself. To have seen a print of the film is to have seen the film; no one would dream of asking to see the film via the projection of the original print. And yet there does indeed exist for each film a master positive, "a fine-grain print of high quality made from the original negative film and designed to be used in the preparation of duplicate negatives rather than for projection" (Katz 787): the very definition of the thing of which any copy is a copy, and hence of an original. This original has a nature sensibly different from that of Beethoven's performance of the Ninth Symphony, of course—the copy of the film refers far more concretely to the master positive, even if there is no way to claim that the master positive is somehow more real than the copy—but in neither case can we consider the original simply absent. The same is true, in fact, of the daily newspaper: although any copy of that newspaper is as good as any other, and as good as the original, there is nevertheless an original, a paste-up, physical or electronic, on which those copies are based.

We must look elsewhere, then, for our copy with no original—perhaps to one of those omnipresent commercial chains currently blighting our beautiful land, such as McDonald's, Target, or the Gap. Here, surely, reproducibility is all, and it would be absurd to claim that there is one real Target of which every other is only

an example or a copy. And yet, whatever architectural differences may exist between one Target and another, there remains the logo (among other signifiers scattered around the premises), unambiguously telling us that this shop respects some model that it must respect in order to be a Target. Even better: a glance at the website of any of these chains will reveal, perhaps after some hunting, a rubric titled "History" or the equivalent, in which the opening of the very first such establishment is lovingly detailed. Again, the role of the original is far less significant here than in the case of the *Mona Lisa*—no Target store really seeks to copy that first one—yet there remains an original, and, curiously, an apparent need to evoke it. Perhaps we should be considering the website itself? A website can be viewed from a thousand different computers, identical in each case, and to my knowledge there is no first version of which all the others are mere reproductions. But even a website can be forged, as is regularly proven by industrious con artists: an underhanded e-mail directs the unwitting mark to what seems the official Amazon site (for instance), but in fact it is not that at all. And what is a forgery if not an exploitation of the existence of an authentic original? Similarly, Tiffany lamps are manufactured in quantity, and every Tiffany Dragonfly Lamp is a Dragonfly Lamp, and is a Tiffany, and to precisely the same extent (one Dragonfly Lamp is not "more" a Dragonfly Lamp than any other); nevertheless, the world teems with "Tiffany lamps" that aren't really Tiffany lamps at all—with counterfeits, in short. A dollar bill follows precisely the same rule: no one dollar bill is better than another, but not all reproductions of dollar bills really are dollar bills (and the fact that they may be in some cases passed off as genuine dollar bills does nothing to change this).

No doubt, then, the truest example of a copy without an original can be found only in the public domain, say in the tic-tac-toe grid: it can be endlessly reproduced, cannot be forged, and every

grid is the grid, and the original is lost in the mists of time, and it doesn't matter. On the other hand, it is entirely possible to reproduce the tic-tac-toe grid badly or wrongly, to make what purports to be a tic-tac-toe grid but isn't really one at all (a grid of two lines by three, for instance). There too, then, the notion of a copy with no connection to some kind of original seems to slip from our grasp. Perhaps the distinction I posed at the beginning of this discussion—between copies with originals and copies without—is at least in part an illusion. It is nevertheless true that the existence of the original is less crucial in the case of the newspaper, the film, the chain store, the dollar bill, and the tic-tac-toe grid than in the case of the *Mona Lisa*, even if the idea of the original is never really wholly absent; it is true, too, that the notion of the original is more crucial in the case of a film than in that of the tic-tac-toe grid. This suggests that we must consider the phenomenon of the copy as a sort of continuum, with the *Mona Lisa*, say, at one end, and perhaps the tic-tac-toe grid at the other. At the *Mona Lisa* end, a copy is at best a lesser version, and at worst a forgery; it can never truly replace the original, and it must (or can only) designate itself as a copy, as not the original. At the tic-tac-toe end, the copy can easily serve as the original with no harm done, and with no real awareness on anyone's part that the copy *is* a copy, or that there is an original—which is not to say that the original is entirely absent or disposable. That latter caveat suggests that I might do well to refine the model I just proposed. The image of the continuum works, but only if we think of it as both asymmetrical and tilted—asymmetrical in that there is an absolute, vital presence of the original at the *Mona Lisa* end, but no corresponding absolute absence of the original at the tic-tac-toe end; tilted in that, although the original is less present on the tic-tac-toe side, the *Mona Lisa* side exerts a sort of gravitational pull from which the denizens of the other side can never fully escape, for no matter

how removed from an original a copy may be, it is never entirely free of it.

Now, where on this continuum to situate my copy of *Le chiendent*? No doubt the reader will already have recognized its place as somewhere on the tic-tac-toe side (though not at the furthest extreme, of course), for any accurate reproduction of *Le chiendent* is, from a reader's standpoint at least, *Le chiendent*, and indeed it is only as a reproduction that *Le chiendent* itself can be seen. Again, as with all copies on that side of the continuum, this is not to say that there is no original: I can see any print of Kubrick's *Lolita* and claim to have seen *Lolita*, but I cannot thereby claim that there is no original of that film, or that the original—the master positive—is completely replaceable by the copy. While in theory any print that is identical to the master positive could play the role of the master positive for the purpose of creating new prints, that does not lessen the importance of the notion of a master positive, the knowledge that such a thing exists and that it is different from (and superior to) any flawed prints that may be out there. The master positive could in theory be any print that is identical to the original print, but what matters is that *there is an absolute* to which all the prints must conform in order to be true and complete prints of the film, more or less like the platinum rod that serves to define the meter (another "original" of something that would appear not to need one). Similarly, any copy of *Le chiendent* that is perfectly identical to the master text can serve as the master text, but there *cannot not* be a master text. As Colonel Ardenti says in Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, "When originals no longer exist, the last copy is the original" (131), a statement that seems to blur the distinction between copy and original, but in fact only reinforces it: no matter what happens, there will always be an original (though of course we should not neglect the other implication of Ardenti's dictum,

that this last remaining original will also always be a copy, for a text cannot exist in any other form).

In this way a novel distinguishes itself from certain of its neighbors on the tic-tac-toe side of the continuum. It is precisely because there is a master text that I must call the bound volume on my desk "a copy of *Le chiendent*." But I would never say that two intersecting pairs of parallel lines form "a copy of the tic-tac-toe grid": they form *the* tic-tac-toe grid. Nor would I say that I have a copy of a dollar bill in my pocket, nor that I viewed a copy of the Target website. There the copy is clearly the thing, and our language (the distinction we make between *Le chiendent* and a copy of *Le chiendent*) suggests that this is not exactly the way we think of a copy of a novel. It begins to seem, then, that my copy of *Le chiendent* occupies more than one spot on the continuum: at once on the tic-tac-toe side (it can be used as the original) and on the *Mona Lisa* side (it must adhere to a certain absolute form in order to be a true copy). For that matter, we can find my copy of *Le chiendent* in the middle of the continuum, too: like a dollar bill, it can serve as the very thing that it represents, but only on certain conditions (it must in theory be authorized by a publisher, for instance). I don't intend to draw up any sort of typology of copies here; I only seek to suggest the kind of complexity that lurks in that simple word "copy," and the even more bewildering intricacies that reveal themselves once we begin to consider that term with reference to a novel.

This at least we can say with some certainty: my copy simultaneously *refers back to* an original (like the *Mona Lisa*) and *serves as* the original (like the tic-tac-toe grid). But at the same time—like a Target store, for example—it refers to the existence of thousands of others like itself. It presents itself as a copy, and not as an original, and just as a Target store would not be a Target store if it were not

part of a vast chain, it is precisely because *Le chiendent* exists in the form of many copies that the book itself is what it is. If there were not many, many copies of *Le chiendent* in the world, the thing we mean when we say *Le chiendent* would be different. My copy of *Le chiendent* is thus singular (it is one specific book and none other, and gives me in theory all there is to be had of that book—unlike a Target store or a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony—so that it is not only as good as any other version, but is in fact in itself the novel) but at the same time it is multiple (were this not one among thousands of other copies, it would not be *Le chiendent*). It derives at least a part of its identity from those others, and from the fact that it is identical to those others, and indeed from the fact that it *matters* that it conform to those others.

But again, even as my copy of *Le chiendent* refers to all the other copies of *Le chiendent* that exist or have ever existed, it also necessarily refers to its original. In absolute terms, it cannot really replace it, but can only tell us of the original's existence and hence of its own *difference* from that original. It's different from the original precisely because it's a copy and the original is not; it's *marked* as a copy in a way that the original is not. And yet, of course, to read this obvious copy of the original is also to have come into contact with the text itself—to have read *Le chiendent*—and so in fact the copy is precisely the same thing as the original. On the one hand, then, my copy of *Le chiendent* obeys the rules that govern all copies (it speaks of an original and of all that original's copies), but on the other it does not: my copy of the book, any copy of the book, *is* (or at least *can be*) the original. How is this possible?

I don't know that I have an answer to that question, but one thing is certain: it cannot be answered until we have arrived at some sort of definition for that word "original," which I've been throwing around in the previous pages as if you and I understood what the word means. We don't, of course, and no doubt it's time we faced our ignorance on that point.

WHAT DOES THE COPY COPY?

There is a very simple answer to this question: the copy on my desk copies the first edition of the novel. Alas, this gets us nowhere, since the first edition is a copy as well. There again, we must ask, of what? Of the proofs, we might be tempted to reply, but we would do well to resist that temptation. The master positive of a film looks exactly like the film: if we didn't know we were seeing a projection of the master positive, we would never guess it. But we cannot read the proofs without realizing that we are reading proofs; they will in all likelihood be printed on a different size of paper from the book, and a different sort of paper, perhaps with centering marks we don't find in the first edition, and certainly without binding. Thus, the first edition copies the *words* found in the proofs, but it is not really a reproduction of the proofs, or perhaps we should say that each page of the first edition is a *partial* representation of a page of the proofs, or, better, that each page is a picture of the corresponding page of the proofs. I don't believe I'm splitting hairs here. The proofs work by copying the words found in the final manuscript, but not their appearance; the first edition works by reproducing the appearance of the words in the proofs, but it does not copy, does not re-create, the proofs themselves. But there is a larger problem here, which is that the thing that the copy copies should in theory be qualifiable as an original (as the *Mona Lisa* is the original of any copies made of it), and that is precisely not what the proofs are, for it is entirely possible to produce a new edition of *Le chiendent* that bears no resemblance to the proofs used in the first edition. The *Le chiendent* that appears in the Pléiade volume of Queneau's novels, to take only one example, looks nothing like the first Gallimard edition: the typeface is different, the pagination is different, and so on. Furthermore, it is entirely possible to publish a Braille edition of

Le chiendent, whose resemblance to the proofs or the first edition could scarcely be slighter, and indeed the text could be reduced to a series of ones and zeroes and reproduced in that way, in a form that has nothing to do with the blots of ink that form the letters on the proofs or on any other printed materialization of the text. Clearly, then, what my copy is a copy of is not exactly the proofs, nor even of the first edition.

I don't want to belabor this point, but it's worth uncovering the full range of differences between the proofs and the book, both theoretical and pragmatic. Imagine the definitive set of proofs for this novel, no doubt preserved somewhere in the publisher's storerooms. This is the sheaf of papers from which the first edition was produced; apart from the differences evoked above, it is identical to the book published as *Le chiendent*. Now suppose that I was writing an article on *Le chiendent* and had access to those proofs, and chose to use them as the source for my quotations from the book. The page numbers would of course be identical to those of the first edition, and if I said nothing about my choice of text, no one would guess that I was quoting from the proofs rather than from the published book. If I *did* mention this, on the other hand—say in the Works Cited, as to my mind professional ethics would dictate—then my reader (or more likely the referees or editor of the journal in which I was attempting to publish my article) would almost certainly demand to know why I chose to use the proofs as my reference text rather than the text itself. Indeed, I think they would very likely demand that I change my Works Cited entry to refer to the published version. Why would they do this? It's not simply a question of the text's availability to the reader; even if I included a note indicating that the page numbers I cite are identical to those of the first edition, but that I myself am using the proofs as my source, I think they would

still come back with the same demurrer. No, the real reason must be that when I talk about *Le chiendent* I am not talking about the proofs; I am talking about the text, which means the published text. If your article was about the proofs, they would say, then it would be perfectly legitimate to use the proofs as your source, but if your subject is the book, then you should cite the book. Similarly, on the open market, the proofs could never be sold simply as *Le chiendent*; they would necessarily be sold as the proofs for *Le chiendent*. It must be, then, that the proofs are not *Le chiendent* in the same way or to the same extent that the published volume is, even if that volume does copy something that is in the proofs. The original cannot be located in the proofs, then: the proofs *can* be the thing copied (or rather partially copied) to produce the copy, but they need not be.

And of course the proofs are already copies of something else: the final draft of the manuscript. Somewhere in this world, there does indeed exist a final draft of *Le chiendent* that Queneau submitted to his publishers, and which, with the exception of a few presumably slight emendations made to the proofs, is essentially the source of the text we read when we read *Le chiendent*. Let's assume that no emendations were made to that final draft, that this typescript or definitive manuscript is identical to the work itself. Is that manuscript *Le chiendent*? Is that the original of which my copy is a copy?

Again, not exactly. In the first place, we might make the same very obvious argument we made with respect to the proofs: the published text does not have the same form as the manuscript. It is printed rather than handwritten or typed, the paper is of a different size, the margins are different, it is bound, and so on. But of course this has to do with the appearance of the text, not with its substance; besides, as we said earlier, copies regularly—and

perhaps always—differ in some sense from the thing that they copy. Very well, but we must also consider what that different form implies: the book is produced for a market, which the manuscript is not, or at least not in the same way. And since that book is produced for a market, it has its own reproducibility built into it; as soon as a copy of the text is printed, it refers, as I've said, to all the other copies of itself even as it refers back to an original. And one part of the being of *Le chiendent* is that it is a novel reproduced many times in print, and one intended for reproduction in print. There is thus a fundamental difference in kind between the text and the manuscript: the text exists (at least in part) by virtue of its multiplicity, the manuscript by virtue of its singularity. And the manuscript's singularity stems from another marked difference in kind, namely, that the manuscript is identifiably of the author (it passed from the author's hands to those of the publisher, in the case of a final and definitive draft), whereas the copy, even the first edition, is identifiably not; it is of the publisher. An author might be given several copies of the book by the publisher, or be offered an opportunity to buy them at a discount, but precisely because these are things *given or sold to* the author by the publisher, they plainly do not *belong to* the author. There must be some different quality that the work takes on when it appears as a published volume.

In his article "Truth in Fiction," the philosopher David Lewis offers us a fine way of understanding this distinction: "[A] fiction is a story told by a storyteller on a particular occasion. He may tell his tales around the campfire or he may type a manuscript and send it to his publisher, but in either case there is an act of storytelling. Different acts of storytelling, different fictions. When Pierre Menard retells *Don Quixote*, that is not the same fiction as Cervantes's *Don Quixote*—not even if they are in the same language and match word for word" (265). I said earlier that the published

copy is "of the publisher" more than "of the author," and this is why. The publisher is the author of the copy in the same way that Menard is the author of his transcription of *Don Quixote*; in both cases, someone else's words have been reproduced, and in that reproduction a difference is created. Indeed, if what I said earlier about painting is true, then it needn't even be someone else's work that is reproduced. When David made a copy of his painting of Napoleon, the result was a different painting, because the setting of his creation, the context, had changed: the second painting exists in the presence of the first, whereas the first painting existed solely in itself.

If we believe in Lewis's model, then we can only conclude that the original text is not really a copy of the manuscript or typescript or proofs, because the context is different. The original is a different book. Presumably two copies of the same edition of the book could be seen as interchangeable—the context of their creation is the same—but not a published copy and a manuscript. And there is one final point to be noted here: the manuscript (and for the moment we are still talking about the final, definitive draft, the one sent to the publisher by the author) is *also* a copy. Something came before it; these same words (before whatever changes and revisions) were written on some other sheet of paper or encoded in some other word-processing program before this point. The definitive draft is to one degree or another a copy of the draft before, and that draft of the draft before, and so on, back to a time when the text did not exist as any sort of draft at all, when it was only a few words scribbled down on a sheet of notebook paper, perhaps, or simply a notion in the author's mind; and even then, that notion no doubt did not spring fully formed from his or her imagination, but at least in part reproduced notions that had come forth before, and so on and so forth. The text thus refers, in a way, to the definitive draft, but that definitive draft is not an original;

it is a copy of a copy of a copy. We might say, then, that the text is a copy that has no original.

Fine words, those, but this claim is still less certain than I have just made it sound—which is not to say that the objection to this statement is any more reassuring than the statement itself. Because in fact there *is* an original; the only difficulty is that it is in all likelihood invisible, and even that it lacks any real originary force.

In an article on the nature of the copy in a digital world, David Levy offers a thoughtful example of a copy that ostensibly has no original: a coin produced by pouring molten metal into a mold. The mold is the source of every coin produced from it, Levy says, but because the mold cannot be spent (just as the proofs cannot be sold as the book), the mold cannot be an original: there is in fact no original. The coins thereby produced are “copies of one another,” but not of their origin (27; emphasis in original). Levy’s argument is a convincing one—indeed, I have already argued that one way in which a copy of a book exists is as a copy of all the other copies—but I don’t see how it follows that in this instance there is no original. The fact that the mold cannot be spent means only that the mold is not the original, not that there is no original. There is an original: the very first coin produced by that mold. That coin can be spent, and while it is indistinguishable from the others, it is also different from them, for it is the one coin that all the others must resemble in order to be spendable.

It’s not hard to see how this can be applied to the copy of a book. As I have already said, the first set of proofs copies the words found in the final manuscript, but not their appearance; the first edition reproduces the appearance of the words in the proofs, but it does not copy the proofs themselves. This means that the first edition of a book, while already a copy, is at the same time the first physical manifestation of the book in its true form, and in its (temporarily) definitive context. In other words, like the first

coin produced by the mold, the first edition is a copy that is also an original. Or at least we might say this of *the first copy* of the first edition to be printed and bound, were it not for the fact that I know of no publisher who attempts to distinguish that very first copy from the other books in that print run. That very first copy will no doubt come to the publishers in a box along with the other first-run volumes, but nothing will single it out as the very first copy (or rather as the true original), and while it may end up on the publisher’s shelves or in the hands of the author, no one will ever know which one it is. Somewhere, there is the true original *Le chiendent*, the “first one” of which every other copy is a copy, that “first one” being of course already a copy and yet in another sense not a copy at all; somewhere that book exists, and no one will ever find it, nor know that it is the original as they hold it in their hands.

We might best see that original of *Le chiendent* as a sort of emblem of this or any book’s two-sided existence. Nothing can replace the original; there is only one, and there will never be another. That original thus has an existence somehow different from that of the copies, a sort of authority or reality that they lack. But because that original in no way behaves like an original (it cannot be distinguished from the copies, and it need not exist in order for the copies to be copies of it), it undoes its own authority, erasing the very idea of an original, in part because it—a copy—is the original. That original is thus as real and as necessary as it is imaginary and disposable, and this coexistence of opposites should be aligned with others we’ve touched on here: that the book is at the same time a set of events and a set of words, at the same time a singular experience and a plethora of reproducible materializations. In all cases, both aspects of the book’s existence are equally true and equally real. To neglect the reality of either side is to fail to see the true nature of the book. To see the novel only as open—

perfectly approachable as a reproduction without reference to an original—is to neglect the very reality that allows us to see it as open (the original that allows or forces it to be what it is), and to see it only as closed and absolute—approachable only as its original self—is to undermine the very possibility of reading (if the original is the only true novel, then how could we read any other form of it?). Every copy is in some sense a partial or simply *different* materialization of the book itself, which does not prevent a copy from offering us the book itself, for along with its immutable form the book itself exists as something that can be duplicated or read in various manners and yet remain entirely itself.

But if the book itself exists in some immutable form, then what is that form? We have perhaps located, in all its inexistence, the original of *Le chiendent*, but this is not to say that the original is the book itself. Surely, when I say "*Le chiendent*," I am not exactly referring to that one original volume; the book itself must still be somewhere else. But where?

WHERE IS THE BOOK ITSELF?

I am not the first to pose that question. René Wellek and Austin Warren devote an entire chapter to it in their venerable *Theory of Fiction* (142–57), and their discussion can give us a first glimpse into its difficulty. Wellek and Warren consider a number of possible answers to the question of "what and where is a poem" (142)—that it is to be found in the printed word, or in the sounds produced when it is recited, or in the experience of the reader, or of the author—and reject them all (we will return to some of these ideas further on). In the end, they conclude that "the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers" (150). But where are these norms to be found? Here their excellent discussion begins to wander a bit, but after some hemming and hawing ("To deal with this matter

properly we should have to settle such controversies as those of nominalism versus realism, mentalism versus behaviourism—in short, all the chief problems of epistemology" [153]), they affirm, more or less straightforwardly, that "The work of art . . . appears as an object of knowledge *sui generis* which has a special ontological status. . . . It is a system of norms of ideal concepts which are intersubjective. They must be assumed to exist in collective ideology, changing with it, accessible only through individual mental experiences, based on the sound-structure of its sentences" (156). I find these words both beautiful and frustrating: they describe wonderfully how a *reading* of a text works, but in no way do they answer the question (which is, after all, the one posed by the authors at the beginning of the chapter) of where the real text *is*. Most particularly, I wonder why, if access to this set of norms comes only, at its origin, from an encounter with "the sound-structure of its sentences," those sentences themselves should not be seen as the answer. But this Wellek and Warren have already explicitly denied: the identification of the text with a printed form of that text is "obviously . . . quite unsatisfactory," they write (142), a position echoed by Richard Wollheim, whose *Art and Its Objects* similarly argues that a work may not be conceived simply as the physical object that is a book. The volume on my table, writes Wollheim, borrowing his vocabulary from C. S. Peirce, is not itself the work, but rather a token of a type, and only that type can be considered the work. Thus, "*Ulysses* and *Der Rosenkavalier* are types; my copy of *Ulysses* or tonight's performance of *Der Rosenkavalier* are tokens of those types" (65). Is it thus in the type that we will find the book itself? Presumably yes, but then what is a type? Here I no longer understand Wollheim's argument, for he soon lists as one example of a type "the case of a poem, which comes into being when certain words are set down on paper or perhaps, earlier still, when they are said over in the poet's head" (69). Are those

words on paper the poem itself, then, or are they simply a trace of the poem's coming to be? If the former, then the work itself *can* be traced to one single physical object; if the latter, then how can they serve as a type, since they are not really the poem? That is, if the words "said over in the poet's head" are the type, how to explain that its tokens take such a radically different form from the thing they supposedly reproduce?

Like Wellek and Warren, then, Wollheim argues quite lucidly that the text itself cannot be certain things, or cannot be found in certain places, but grows surprisingly vague when it comes time to say what or where the text *is*. F. W. Bateson, in "The New Bibliography and the 'New Criticism,'" answers that latter question with more self-assurance. From one point of view, he writes, we might assume that *Hamlet* can be found in our perceptions as we witness a performance or read the text, but this is not exactly so; there does indeed exist "an objective *Hamlet* behind our individual experiences of it," and which is the cause or origin of those experiences (10). The true, original *Hamlet*, he tells us—echoing Wollheim's argument but casting it far more conclusively—is in fact *oral*, or at least semi-oral, rather than written. It comes into being when the author prepares the final draft, the one that will be sent to the printer. The original and thus singularly real text is not the written draft thus created, however, but rather the mental process that determines it: "as he prepares his fair copy, the sentences in the rough drafts in front of him, instead of staying put on the paper, come to a second life in his mind, to be tested there against his inner ear as they re-enact themselves in his imagination. What he is really copying is this oral drama of the mind in its definitive form" (8). The original is "articulated sound" (10); the printed or even the handwritten text is simply "a *translation*, for storage purposes, as it were, of what has already been expressed orally and temporally into visual and spatial equivalents. A book

bears the same imperfect relationship to the original literary artifact that your photograph does to you" (7; emphasis in original).

The idea is striking, and strikingly easy to dispute. Glibly, we might dismiss it as a textbook case of logocentrism, but I think there's more to be said than that. Perhaps it is possible to see the author's internally pronounced words as the origin of the text because they precede the written representation of those words, but if an origin is what we are looking for, then surely we must realize that those internally pronounced words themselves come about as a result of something that preceded them: they could, after all, be considered the representation of the electrochemical process that produced them in the author's brain. And indeed, since it is the written words of the *penultimate* draft that set off this oral drama of the mind, it's difficult to see why we shouldn't consider *them* the real origin, unless we should rather be looking toward the draft before that, or the one before that, or the one before that. We might also wonder if the scenario that Bateson is describing ever really happens: perhaps Shakespeare produced a truly definitive final draft, never subsequently emended but rather printed precisely as it stood, but, as the Pléiade edition of *Le chiendent* amply shows, Queneau didn't. Like a great many authors, he continued to make small changes to the text up to the very last proof before the final printing. No doubt Bateson would retort that the final set of proofs is simply the modern equivalent of Shakespeare's fair copy, and that the process thus remains identical. Perhaps, but in any case I don't entirely understand why Bateson depicts this passage from the penultimate draft to the final one as such a smooth, onetime process—one that takes some time, no doubt, but nevertheless assuming the form of a single, essentially uninterrupted encounter with the text. Or perhaps I do understand: he needs to present the formation of the definitive draft in that way so as to suggest the existence of a single original in the author's mind. If the

process were described, more realistically, as something fragmented and discontinuous, that notion of the original would seem far less satisfying, and so harder to swallow. Finally, we would do well to note the paradox inherent in Bateson's formula: there is indeed an objective original, but it is inaccessible both to the reader and to the author. As James McLaverty writes, "the audience has no real encounter with the work" in Bateson's model (87), but I think it important to add that the same is true of the author, once that ephemeral drama of the mind has taken place. The drama of the mind cannot be located, cannot be re-created; if that's the case, it's difficult to see how it can be said to *exist*, and particularly to exist *physically*, as Bateson tells us it does (8). Bateson's model might tell us where *Hamlet* comes from, but it really doesn't begin to answer the question of where *Hamlet* is to be found: if what he says is true, it certainly isn't anywhere today, and perhaps it never was.

But there is one aspect of Bateson's argument—and of Wollheim's—that strikes me as worth considering seriously. If we strip Bateson's idea of the unnecessary and tenuous distinction between words heard in the author's mind and words written on a page, and accept Wollheim's idea that what he calls the type comes into existence with the inscription of words on a page, then we are left with the notion that the "real *Hamlet*" is quite simply a collection of words. Reading Wollheim, Bateson, or Wellek and Warren, one gets the feeling they're trying to avoid defining the text in that way, and I'm not sure I see why. However simplistic it might seem, this definition has a real usefulness, not least because it accounts for what we actually see when we look at a work. Earlier on, I alluded to Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" when I was asking you to imagine "the text itself," and it will be useful to return to that subject now. Think of that title, and if you know the poem by heart, you will find yourself reciting it in your mind. If you don't know the poem that well, you will rather summon up some of the

images arising from those words, or the "message," more or less as you would do with a novel. But even in that latter case, what you are recalling is the set of images or the message *created by* those words. (And if you have never heard of the poem, you will conjure up an *imaginary* poem about a red wheelbarrow, which will once again take the form of a collection of words.) Thus, if "The Red Wheelbarrow" is anything, it is the twenty-one (or perhaps nineteen) words that make it up; if "The Red Wheelbarrow" or any other text is anywhere, it is in that precise collection of words. Without worrying about the *origin* of that poem, we can at least, if we think of it in this way, *find* the poem; we can claim that when we talk about the poem we are talking about a thing that can be seen, and when we talk about that poem with others we and they can not only assume that we are talking about the same thing, but can in fact *be* talking about the same thing.

There are two very obvious objections to be made to this claim. First, it still doesn't allow us to say where those words (rather than a particular physical manifestation of those words) are. Second, those words aren't necessarily stable: not every edition of a book offers the reader precisely the same set of words. There are, for instance, slight differences between the first edition of *Le chiendent* and a revised edition printed in 1968. But the differences needn't be slight: the 1753 edition of *Manon Lescaut* adds an entire episode (the story of the Italian prince) that does not appear in the 1731 edition. If I attempt to define *Manon Lescaut* as a certain set of words, should I define it as the set of words that does include this episode, or the one that doesn't? The novel has, after all, been both sets of words, at different times, and to conclude that the earlier version is not *Manon Lescaut* because it does not include a number of words that appear in that later version is obviously untenable. This second objection is a very serious one, which we must now address before we can return to the first.

The fact that an author or publisher can change a text from one printing to the next (a truth undreamt of in Bateson's model, or at least one left conveniently unspoken) would seem to forbid any definition of the work as simply a bounded assemblage of words. This innate mutability of texts is what Jerome J. McGann calls "the textual condition": "The textual condition's only immutable law is the law of change," he writes (9). This idea is perhaps most compellingly illustrated in the final chapter of his book *The Textual Condition*, which reproduces a lecture in which McGann attempts to define the being of the very text he is reading aloud (or that, in his book, we are reading on the page). "What is *this text*?" he asks, referring to the lines he is delivering to his audience, and proposes two possible answers: first, "the written order of words on the typescript pages I have in front of me at 'this' very moment"; and second, "the oral and spectacular order of words which come to you 'now' in the form of a lecture you are partly hearing and partly watching" (180). McGann suggests that the two texts are not identical, in part because the performative nature of the second always makes certain alterations to the first, or reproduces the first in a specific, irreproducible way. The lecture will be slightly different each time it's delivered; its being is fluid, not fixed. But in fact, he tells us, the same is true of the lecture's typescript: it will not "keep its integrity and remain equal to itself," for "the typescript, like the lecture, is a certain kind of human construct, and hence it cannot be objectively situated (whether by rational definition or by scientific description). Its own radical particularity forbids such permanence and commensurability." This is so for two reasons: first, because "the typescript has inscribed within it an entire production history comprising numerous changes and variations"; and second, because "as a certain type of communicative mechanism the typescript, like the lecture, is the locus of human intercourse. Every time this typescript is put to some communica-

tive use, it undergoes transformation" (181). Existing as it does in the textual condition, a text is always caught up in the labyrinth of its own production and reception. It is its very nature to be variable, productive rather than completed, always in the process of being re-created, in "a ceaseless process of textual development and mutation—a process which can only be arrested if all the textual transformations of a particular work fall into nonexistence" (9). In short, there is "no single 'text' of a particular work" that "can be imagined or hypothesized as the 'correct' one" (62), for "literary work by its very nature sets in motion many kinds of creative intentionalities" that "orbit in the universe of the creative work—but not around some imaginary or absolute center" (75). The text, then, is in no particular place: it is not an object but a force, not a location but a locus. If we really must define its being, it can only be located in *all* the various forms it has taken, from the first word of the manuscript project to the various editions to the various readings of those editions.

McGann's notion of the being of the text is thus diametrically opposed to Bateson's. Bateson believes firmly in the existence of one true text, while McGann energetically rejects that possibility. They do, however, resemble each other in one important respect: they both forbid the mortal reader any access to the work itself. Bateson suggests that what we read is merely a shadow of the real thing, while McGann tells us that what we read is merely one facet of the real thing, and that it would be impossible to see all facets, as they are limitless and forever shifting. The difference between those two points of view is surprisingly small, for in both cases the text is removed from the sphere of ordinary human understanding, made inaccessible to the experience of a simple reader. Perhaps this doesn't matter; an abstract idea can, after all, be true even if its practical implications are distasteful. But still I resist, because readers will continue to talk about texts—will continue to say, for

instance, "*Le chiendent*"—in the hope and on the understanding that the people they're talking to have some chance of grasping what they're talking about, and I find nothing dishonest or foolish in that desire. Indeed, there is something almost authoritarian about these two stances: they tell us that, whatever text we are looking at at any moment, it is not the *real* text, and from there it is only the slightest jump to say that whatever text we are talking about, whatever we have read, it is not the real thing. Each in his own way—though of course nothing could be further from their intention—Bateson and McGann devalue and dismiss the experience of an ordinary reader, and to my mind that invalidates their arguments.

It is nevertheless difficult to disagree with McGann's theory entirely; indeed, his notion of the fluidity of the text informs much of the argument I want to put forward in this book. At the same time, I can't help but think that the notion of the textual condition must be taken with a heaping tablespoon of salt. What he calls "the law of change" is better understood, I think, as a law of *limited* change (or perhaps a law that limits change). Let's imagine McGann reading the final proofs for his book before its publication, and suppose that by some typesetting error the word "mystical" had been inserted into the text: "The textual condition's only immutable law is the law of mystical change." My sense is that he would ask that this word be deleted. Or imagine I was quoting McGann in this book and reproduced his sentence as "The textual condition's only immutable law is the law of perfect stability." I believe he would then take me to task for distorting his thought. In both cases, of course, he would be right: "mystical" and "perfect stability" are the *wrong words*. Perhaps it could be argued that they are the wrong idea rather than the wrong words; to this I would reply that they are the wrong idea *because* they are the wrong words. Those words don't belong there, they're not *in his text*,

they don't accurately convey his meaning. It seems a ridiculously simple-minded claim, but it's worth saying explicitly: however real the "textual condition," it is not entire. Change is one "law" governing the way texts exist, but it is only one.

Thus, I don't believe we can quite so readily do away with the "certain words in a certain order" that McGann dismisses. If indeed he does dismiss it, that is, for when he writes that creative intentionalities "orbit in the universe of the creative work—but not around some imaginary or absolute center" (75), I find myself stumbling over his odd choice of words: to *orbit* is precisely to revolve around a center, after all (and indeed to do so thanks to the gravitational attraction of that center). And when he writes that "Every time this typescript is put to some communicative use, it undergoes transformation," I can't help thinking that he is describing the very situation he has just tried to deny: the words "this typescript" describe a center, the various transformations it undergoes when it is put to communicative use orbit around it. If there were no center, there would be no "this typescript" to be transformed, and for that matter no transformation, since transformation implies transformation *of something*. McGann is of course right to suggest that in one sense the text cannot be an absolute because it exists within the give-and-take of language, necessarily borrowed, negotiated, and interpreted, and because it is the product of a long process of alterations and developments, but it seems to me that the latter proves only that the text was fluid before it became fixed, and the former argument ignores the fact that the text exists in that give-and-take precisely because it has a definable form. The give-and-take is a wonderful thing, and a vitally important one, but it should not be confused with something that can affect the words on the page. The theoretical place of the text within a continuously mutable and uncentered language does not alter the fact that there are certain words that are in the typescript

and others that aren't. In short, *however else McGann's typescript may exist*, one way in which it exists, one way that cannot simply be talked out of existence, is as a set of words that are at least to a very great degree invariable.

In the end, then, I object to McGann's idea for the same reason I object to Bateson's: both attempt to define the being of the text by limiting it to one way in which the text can exist. Bateson reduces the text to something fixed, McGann to something unfixed; as I said before in a different context, I don't see why it can't be both at the same time. But in order to see how this is possible, we must consider the text in a form that neither Bateson nor McGann would be willing to see as entirely the text, the form of a single printed copy. In that copy, both Bateson's and McGann's ideas are at once confirmed and denied. The copy is a result of a long process of authorial creation and revision, of editorial emendation, of typographical labor, of mercantile decision making, and so on and so forth: the copy is the very illustration of the truth of the textual condition. But at the same time, for the reader who reads it simply *as the book itself*, this is all perfectly irrelevant. What he or she is reading is the book, and—unless we are willing to deny the value of the experience of the vast majority of readers, which I am not—he or she has every right to believe this. Similarly, the book may very well have come to be as a result of the process that Bateson describes, but there is absolutely no reason why the reader should care: for him or her, the electrochemical processes of the author's mind are prehistory, neither here nor there nor anywhere else. The words that he or she has to read in order to have read the book are to be found on the page, and the process by which they were born pales into insignificance next to the reality of their simply being there.

I'm not arguing against either one of these theories, and I certainly do not mean to cite the experience of an imaginary "plain

reader" as a truth more real than any theory because it's down-to-earth and commonsensical. But to my mind there is nothing shameful in the belief that by reading the collection of words housed in the book one has read the work itself, and there *is* something shameful about telling someone who has read the collection of words housed in the book that he or she has not really read the work. This is the implication of Bateson's and McGann's models, an implication made more explicit in the words of Peter Shillingsburg: readers who are content to read a work in only one edition "limit their acquaintance with the work of art," he writes (54), though he will later tell us that "reading a single text of a work of art as if it adequately represented the work or were in fact the work *may* limit the reader's access to the whole work of art" (107; my emphasis), a reformulation that tells us, oddly, both that a single text *does not* adequately represent the work ("as if") and that this might not matter after all. But surely, if the text really is inadequate, it *must* matter. At the same time, is there any understanding of a work of literature that *isn't* "limited"? What exactly would an *unlimited* understanding of a book look like?

But while I am convinced that the single edition or copy is less separable from the work itself than Shillingsburg suggests, I remain wholly uncertain as to which edition of *Manon Lescaut* is the real one. I *think* I believe that we could read either one and claim to have read the novel, but I feel none too sure about that, perhaps simply because I first read it with the Italian prince episode, and so for me the episode has to be there. In any case, the addition of that episode is still a *limited* change; it complicates but does not demolish the contention that the work itself is, among other things, simply a collection of words.

But now we must deal with the other objection to that stance: that it does nothing to help us determine where the text is. If the work is a certain collection of words, and if I find those words in a

printed copy of the work, does that mean that the printed copy is simply the same thing as the work? Could the answer to "Where is *Le chiendent*?" really be that easy? Is it simply in my copy of *Le chiendent*? Or is it in all the copies of *Le chiendent* that have ever been printed? Or is it, as I suggested earlier, in the supposed original of which those copies are (after all, only) copies? Or perhaps in the abstract collection of words that each of those versions, including the original, reproduces? These four possibilities represent, I think, the only logical solutions if we assume that *Le chiendent* can be defined as a finite and definite collection of words, and if these are logical solutions, then in theory at least one of them should work. Alas, I'm not convinced that any of them do.

Take, for instance, the proposition that the novel exists in all the copies of the novel taken together. This claim could be understood in two different ways: we might naively assume that all the copies of the novel are identical, or we might, more realistically, accept the existence of small differences between the various editions. We might even take a stance parallel to McGann's and assume that by "all the copies" we mean every form in which the novel has ever existed, on the theory that the work "manifest[s] itself in a series of texts from the roughest of manuscripts to the most recent edition" (Cohen xxii). In the end, no matter how we interpret the words "all the copies," the result is the same. Add up all the copies or forms of *Le chiendent* that have ever been; in that conglomeration the novel's being resides. This solution has the advantage of granting the book some sort of more or less visible presence (it is somewhere, however diffuse and unencompassable that somewhere might be), and it sensibly considers each copy to be both a copy and an element of the book itself, which certainly feels right. In order to think about this idea, let us assume that there are in this world, say, 100,000 copies of *Le chiendent*, all identical or not. And now—using a test evoked but never really explored to

the end by both Wollheim (5) and Wellek and Warren (142)—let us destroy one of those copies.

At this point one of two things must be true: either something has happened to *Le chiendent*, or nothing has. If something has happened, it can only be that the novel's being has been in some way reduced, that there is now less of it. And from this we must conclude, disturbingly, that any novel of which there are more copies or more versions *exists more* than one of which there are fewer. There are very likely more copies of *La nausée* in this world than there are of *Le chiendent*, and no doubt that numerical superiority reflects the former novel's greater fame; but I strongly resist any idea that the former novel exists more ("more strongly," as Roquentin might say) than the latter, or to a higher degree, as this model necessarily implies. To claim that such a novel does exist more strongly than others obliges us to grant the fullest existence only to often-published, widely read, canonical texts. Perhaps the number of copies in print can tell us something about the *manner* of the book's existence, but the notion that such figures might govern the *extent* of its being seems to me both logically untenable and ethically unjust.

Let us thus reject that first possibility, then, and suppose that *nothing* happens if one of *Le chiendent*'s 100,000 copies is destroyed, that the number of extant copies is immaterial, that a book either exists or does not exist, whether there is one copy or a million, one edition or a thousand, but that in any case the whole of the book is to be found in all its copies together. If this is so, then two further implications must also be true. The first is that a book can exist entirely in a single copy (if there is only one copy). Let us posit the existence of such a book, which I will call *Book X*. *Book X* exists in one single exemplar, in which the whole of its existence is wrapped up. I now turn to my copy of *Le chiendent*, one copy of many, and find that the whole of *Le chiendent*'s existence is *not* to be found

there: my copy of *Le chiendent* now seems like something smaller than the copy of *Book X*, something less whole, less itself. *Book X* is more precious, more vital than my copy of *Le chiendent*. In other words, we are back where we started from, in reverse: the copy of *Book X* has a kind of existence that is different from (and greater or stronger than) the existence of my copy of *Le chiendent*, and again I cannot agree. The other implication is that, since I destroyed nothing when I destroyed that one copy of *Le chiendent*, it wasn't really *Le chiendent* at all: although in theory it was an element of the novel's entire being, its disappearance in no way lessened that being, which must mean that it wasn't an element of the novel's entire being after all. Alas, the notion that nothing happens when a copy is destroyed seems no more palatable to me than the notion that something does, and since one of those two alternatives must be true if the novel's being is to be found in the sum of its copies, I think we can now safely discard that hypothesis.

The lines above have already given us an answer to the second possibility, that *Le chiendent* exists equally in every copy of *Le chiendent*. If this is the case, then it should be true that *Le chiendent* will go on existing to precisely the same extent so long as even one single copy of it survives. There is not "more *Le chiendent*" if there are 100,000 copies extant, and not "less *Le chiendent*" if there is only one; even if I destroyed every copy of *Le chiendent* but one, *Le chiendent* would still exist to the same extent. And this presumably means that *Le chiendent* really would cease to exist if I went ahead and destroyed that last copy. The act of destroying a copy of *Le chiendent* would thus be harmless in, say, 99,999 cases, and extremely harmful in one. In that one case, there would be a genuine passage from existence to nonexistence; the text I am destroying would no longer be a copy of *Le chiendent*, but would be *Le chiendent* itself, which each of the other 99,999 copies explicitly would not be, since I can destroy them without doing any dam-

age to *Le chiendent* itself. Thus, it must be the case that *Le chiendent* does not exist entirely in each of those other 99,999 copies. In other words, this notion of the existence of the text is inherently self-contradictory; it sounds and feels right, but it doesn't hold up if looked at too closely. I'm not prepared to call it wrong; rather, I only wish to note that it is not quite logical, and not quite coherent in purely practical terms, which I consider no less meaningful than the theoretical kind.

Let us now move on to a possibility very similar to what Bateson suggests, that *Le chiendent* exists in a place that cannot be reduced to one or more copies of *Le chiendent*: that it exists abstractly, that it is "there," as an idea, as a certain set of words or thoughts that do not need to be written down in order to be. There is something very pleasing about this notion: if I destroyed the last copy of *Le chiendent*, it would no doubt be wrong to claim that it no longer exists at all, because it would live on in the memory of all those who have read it (an idea movingly demonstrated in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*). But eventually those people will die; once that melancholy event has taken place, is there truly no *Le chiendent* left at all? If this fourth possibility is real, then we should be able to say that *Le chiendent* would still exist even then, unattainable perhaps, but no less real, just as, for instance, Apuleius's novel *Hermagoras* "exists" thanks to Priscian's reference to it, even if the novel itself is seemingly lost forever. At the very least, *Hermagoras* exists more than a novel that Apuleius never wrote, as would, perhaps, a novel written by Apuleius but never referred to by another writer. For this would be the real test of this theory: does a book continue to exist even if all its copies are lost and no one remembers or refers to it? I have a real sympathy for that idea; the thing that exists in some sense independently of its printed manifestations is precisely what I mean by "the book itself." There's nothing particularly mystical in this notion of the continued existence of a physically

unattainable book; seen in this way, the novel would simply be comparable to the number pi, say. Pi need not be written down to exist (in fact, it *cannot* be written down, as it is not yet and never will be fully defined). Pi is to be found in no one specific place, but it exists all the same, and will go on existing even if it is never used or talked about again. Wellek and Warren argue against just this conception, on the grounds that unlike pi the work is created at a specific point in time, and is subject to change and even destruction (153). These are indeed differences between pi and a novel, but I don't see why they have to be *determinative* differences. To be sure, pi is not a human creation as a novel is, and it would be a mistake to ascribe to a novel the kind of transcendent existence that an abstract number enjoys. On the other hand, it could be argued that once a novel is written down it too ceases to be a human creation, that it becomes an act of language, abstract and unlocalizable. But there is a more troublesome objection to this idea than Wellek and Warren's, for the text-as-abstract-collection-of-words theory suggests, once again, that printed materializations are not *Le chiendent*, that the work is somehow different from the words on the printed page, just as a printed approximation of pi is not pi, or as the numeral 4 is not the number four. And this comparison makes no sense at all: we can learn nothing of the number four simply by staring at the numeral 4, no matter how intently, but we can learn a great deal, and perhaps everything, about the text by looking at it closely (by reading it, in other words). Thus, if we argue that the text's real existence lies in the realm of the abstract, we make the concrete realizations somehow lesser, less real, a representation of the novel's words rather than the words themselves, and that argument doesn't feel right either (doesn't reflect the reader's experience), even if I believe that the certain words that make up the text need not necessarily be seen as a collection of printed characters.

Still unconvinced that we have found an answer to the question of where the text really is, then, we are left with a possibility I discarded some way back, but which our language itself implies is the right one: *Le chiendent* is to be found in the original text of *Le chiendent*, of which the various copies (those that copy that original text faithfully) are copies. Here at least we escape some of the incoherence of the other potential solutions. Destroying the original is clearly not the same thing as destroying a copy, so if there were no copies left, the destruction of the original actually would be a different sort of act. Also, all texts would exist to the same extent, since every text presumably stems from some sort of original; it would furthermore be perfectly justifiable to say that the work exists somewhere other than in the pages of its copies (the copies would give full access to the work, assuming they were faithful copies, but they would not exactly *be* the work). This answer works wonderfully well, so long as we are not too troubled by everything I said before: by the fact that this original, assuming it exists, is unlocatable, and that if it is locatable (as the first copy off the production line) it is indistinguishable in every way from every other copy of the first edition, and that in any case it is as much a result of a process as it is an origin, since it is itself a copy, and that there are, after all, in all likelihood, innumerable "copies" of that original that are not *perfect* copies of it, and so are perhaps not copies of it at all and may not really offer us perfect access to the work, and that we cannot know this without a close comparison of our copy to that original, a comparison that most of us will never undertake, which means that we might easily think we're reading a book by reading a copy of it when in fact we're not really reading it at all. And that, I think, seems a great deal not to be troubled by.

I will turn to the problem of the flawed copy in a moment; before I do so, however, I'd like to pause and note what we've just

found. "Where is *Le chiendent*?" is an absurd question to ask, and an unnecessary one. If we do ask it, however, it is possible to come up with a range of potential answers, each of which is plausible from one point of view and unacceptable from another. It can sensibly be argued that the text exists in all its copies taken together, as weather does (any individual instance of weather is only an instance of weather, and weather is made up of all those instances together), and that it exists equally in every one of its editions, and in every copy of every edition (as water, for instance, exists in and as every molecule of H₂O that makes it up), and that it exists primarily and transcendently only in its first edition, of which every other version is only a replica (like a painting), and also that it exists as an *idea*, external to any particular physical form, the various editions of which—from the first to the last—are only instances (in the same way that bravery exists independently of any act of bravery, and would go on existing as a concept or an ideal even if people gave up performing brave acts forever). These are all defensible answers; perhaps they are all right, even as they are all in some sense wrong. Just as the copy can only be said to exist at a variety of points along the continuum of copies, its being can perhaps best be defined as all of these possibilities at once, notwithstanding the flagrant self-contradictions visible in such a solution. I still don't know how to answer that question, nor will I ever; I firmly believe that there must *be* an answer, however, even as I believe in that answer's impossibility. But clearly, to come up with an unambiguous answer is to ignore all the questions that answer gives rise to. More important than coming up with an answer is realizing that the being of a novel eludes definition and delimitation, that, however possible it is to read and understand novels, it is less possible to say with any certainty in what sense or in what way they exist. This, I would argue, is a beautiful truth about

novels (as is, for that matter, their ability to be read without once considering such questions). What I'm getting at here is that the way in which a text comes to us is profoundly unlikely. We read a book, and have a certain experience of it, and in one sense this is very simple, and this is indeed the way in which a book exists; but it is not the *only* way, and that other way is very complicated, as we can discover only when we force ourselves to take note of the existence of the book as a copy. But the fact that the other way is very complicated is *all* we can discover about it: we cannot really determine, I think, what that other way "is." The existence of a copy tells us that there is such a thing as something that is not a copy, something that would be the book itself, but everywhere we try to find that book itself we only find it eluding us.

* But wherever the book itself is, I can only get at it by way of a copy, and perhaps not all copies really are copies, not because of a later authorial revision but simply because they contain some sort of mistake, and this poses a difficult question.

IS A FLAWED COPY A COPY?

If we conflate the book itself with the original, then we make of the original an *object*, a singular unit, of which any flawed copy cannot be a true copy at all. My paperback edition of *Le chiendent* is in fact one of these. At the start of chapter 3, we find Étienne telling Pierre of his son Théo, and speaking a sentence that might be translated as follows: "I think he's lying, but I don't ca e" (Folio 127). Clearly (I suppose), what the French text is supposed to have for that last word is not "moq e" but "moque," as we find in the first edition. If the text is indeed certain words in a certain order, or indeed if the text is the text of the original, then can we legitimately say that this copy of *Le chiendent* is in fact *Le chiendent*?

This question will be discussed more fully in a later chapter; for the moment I prefer to remain on the level of naive induction.

Naively, then, I can imagine three possible answers to that question. The first, the hard-line answer, is that this is not *Le chiendent* at all, since it fails to reproduce correctly every one of the words that make up the original text, the book itself. The second is that this is of course *Le chiendent*, every bit as much *Le chiendent* as the first edition. It is simply *Le chiendent* with a typographical error. But of course the issue of the typographical error does not disappear merely because one names it as such; there remains the *effect* of the typographical error, which this stance would see as insignificant, assuming that the reader will either not notice it at all, or will notice it but simply mentally correct it and move on. A third answer might grow out of that first one: that this is not exactly *Le chiendent* in the absolute sense, but that it really doesn't matter (the vast majority of this edition has no typos, so this edition is almost entirely *Le chiendent*, regardless of that one little flaw).

Like my answers to the question of where *Le chiendent* is, each of these possibilities has an essentially sound logical foundation, and each, with a little reflection, begins to seem naggingly unconvincing. We can perhaps see this most clearly in the case of the first answer. There is something appealingly resolute about this stance, a kind of comfortable absolutism about its definition of the text: if a copy of a given text contains a typo, then it is not the text. A fine, untroubled answer, but who could seriously support it? If a single typo is enough to make the text something other than the text, and given that not every typo is as readily discernible as that missing letter in *Le chiendent*—given, that is, that there may well be typos we don't know are there—then it becomes impossible to say that *any* text is in fact the text that it purports to be. If one typo makes the text we're reading not the text, how can we legitimately claim to have read anything at all? I refuse to accept any answer to a question of reading that makes reading impossible, and so have no choice but to reject this very sensible response out of hand.

The second answer is scarcely more credible, though for a more indirect reason. It suggests that the reader need not be wholly present in his or her reading of the text in order to have read the text—or rather that the reader *must not* be wholly present. This brief, necessary absence of the reader from the text can take two forms: either we must fail to see the misprint, or we must shift to thoughts of a purely editorial nature in the midst of our reading. Of course, it's profoundly unrealistic to assume that a reader *can* give a text his or her complete and undivided attention; perhaps there's no such thing as undivided attention. We all think of other things while we're reading—things having to do with what we're reading, and things not—and this in no way means we're not performing an optimal reading, whatever that may be. But the possibility of a reader's inattention is not the same thing as a necessity, and that is what we're creating if we simply state that this typo does not meaningfully detract from the reader's experience. If we say that, we are not acknowledging that reading can be inattentive, but decreeing that at this moment of the text the reading *must* be inattentive. This view of the typo thus implies an attitude that I think few of us are likely to embrace—that, however free our reading should be in general, at certain times there is precisely one way we should read in order to go on understanding the text. This stance makes of the typographical error something *different from* the rest of the text, and hence, strangely, contradicts itself: seeking to suggest the invisibility of the typo, its seamless incorporation into the text, it distinguishes it from the text, separates it, gives it a different status from the rest.

And so we come to the third answer: the text does not really have to be entirely itself. So long as it *mostly* reproduces the original, it will remain sufficiently the text as to be readable as the text. We might first note that this stance implicitly but necessarily acknowledges the truth of the first answer, for here too it is affirmed

that the typo is not the text. The difference is that this third approach does not believe that the text must be *entirely* faithful to the text in order to be the text. But this position is no more comfortable than those we've just been considering, for it forces us then to wonder just *how much* infidelity a copy might display and still be considered the text. Perhaps it would be useful here to point out that my Folio edition of *Le chiendent* contains a second misprint: at one point Narcense's name is spelled "Narcence" (143). And a third, in which "Ça" is printed as "Çà" (31). And a fourth, in which a dash (indicating that a character is speaking) is printed before a paragraph in which it is unambiguously the narrator speaking (218). Four typos rather than one: does that change anything? Does this text now seem less *Le chiendent* than it did with only one typo? At the very least, the three further misprints make the text more suspect than it seems at first glance—so suspect, indeed, that one cannot help but begin to see typos everywhere. At one point, the word "voui," an "oral" equivalent of "oui" that occurs frequently in this novel, is printed as "ovui" (171): is that a typo, or does it simply mean "Oh oui"? (Admittedly, "ovouï" would seem a better choice in that latter case, but I can see no reason why "vui" could not be used to imply a more forceful pronunciation of "oui" than "voui" does.) At another point, the word "seau" is printed as "siau" (53): misprint, slip of the authorial hand, or faithful reproduction on Queneau's part of an oral deformation of that word? How, after all, are we to know? So many of the oddities of Queneau's writing could be dismissed as misprints: this is one aspect of their humor (a reader unfamiliar with Queneau who picks up *Zazie dans le métro*, for instance, may conclude on encountering the first word that something has gone horribly wrong in the typesetting department). But in order for the reader to fully appreciate these deliberate deformations of standard spelling, he or she must be able to trust that they are in fact deliberate, and with every visible

misprint that trust can only decline, potentially undermining the reader's confidence in the text and thus his or her ability to read it. Hence, the existence of typos may not prevent the book from being the text in the abstract sense only: it may also prevent the reader's experience from being a true experience of the novel.

Little wonder, then, that Jerome McGann apparently discounts the typo from his conception of the textual condition. Philip Cohen tells us that McGann's *New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* offers the reader "the first printed versions of poems with the printers' errors corrected," so as to reveal "not the texts that authors finally wanted to appear before their audience but rather the texts that appeared before their original audiences" (xvii). Cohen calls this tactic "innovative," and indeed it is—but, because he corrects those typos, McGann here contradicts his own insistence on the significance of the text's production history, or rather he sees those typos as not a real part of that history, not part of "the texts that appeared before their original audiences," not really the text.

It's an absurdly simplistic argument, but not, I think, an empty one: the more typos, the less useful the copy, which means that any typo—even just one—represents a failing, and a separation from the novel itself. However you might feel about the question of whether or not *Le chiendent* with a typo is indeed the text it purports to be, it nevertheless seems to me likely that, given the choice between two identically priced editions of the novel, one with a typo and one without, you would reasonably opt for the edition without the typo. Clearly, a typo-free edition is a *better* edition than the other, a truer rendering of the text than the other, as McGann's corrections show. Clearly, too, it would be possible to print a text with so many typos that it really does cease to be the text. Suppose there were an edition of, say, *Lolita* in which every word contained some sort of typographical error. Is that text still *Lolita*? "Low liter, right on ye lice, fie on me lions." Still *Lolita*?

This is a difficult question. Surely such a text could not be sold as *Lolita*, could not really be read as *Lolita*, much less used as a source for an academic discussion of it. And yet a trace of *Lolita* remains in the sentence I have just written; the rhythm, of course, the structure, but also, behind these apparent similarities, a certain history (it was by deforming the first few words of *Lolita* and of no other novel that this sentence was produced). This version is not *Lolita*, then, but it is *partly Lolita*. Now compare the version with one typo to the version with as many typos as there are words: whether one sees that latter version as somehow *Lolita* or not, it seems to me reasonable to say that the one-typo version is *more Lolita* than the other, and that the no-typo version is *more Lolita* still (indeed, we could say that it is the most *Lolita*, the absolute).

A given novel, then, may well be defined as a certain set of words in a certain order, but depending on one's point of view, this either is or is not an absolute set of parameters. It seems entirely reasonable to claim that only a perfect rendering of those words in that order constitutes the text, but in the light of what we have just discussed it seems no less reasonable to conclude that there are degrees of being the text, that a one-typo edition is not "not the text" but is nonetheless *less* the text than the perfect edition. A two-typo version is still less the text, a three-typo version still less, and so on. At some point it must become possible to say that the accumulation of typos has finally tipped the balance and produced something that is indeed not the text at all. That point is not abstract but, in its impalpable way, perfectly concrete: if you were to pick up a book whose cover announced it to be *Le chien-dent* and were then to discover that the first sentence is "I am in my mother's room" and the last sentence "It was not raining," and so forth and so on, you would be entirely right to say that this text

is not *Le chien-dent* at all but *Molloy*. At some point, the existence of miswritten sentences, piled one upon the other, will make of the text something other than what it's called. But how many typos does it take to tip the balance? Ten? Fifty? There's really no point in asking this question: we have no way of knowing. And yet there *must* in fact be such a point. Peter Shillingsburg tells of reading a copy of *Ivanhoe* into which a page from *The Black Dwarf* had mistakenly been bound: "The bindery had spoiled the book and the effect; by the time I found my place in another edition I had ceased to care about the fate of Rebecca" (123). He doesn't say so explicitly, but his words suggest that that anomalous page not only made the copy not *Ivanhoe*, but even made impossible the (subsequent) *reading* of *Ivanhoe*. Is that exactly what it takes? One page?

It would thus appear that each of these three responses to the question of the effect of a misprint on the text, however plausible and usable it may be, is at the same time fundamentally untrustworthy, or at least partial. I will go no further than that: I do not mean to say that an edition with a typo is the text, nor that it is not, only that either answer is defensible and indefensible. Again, the text is at the same time fluid and solid, open and closed. I thus mean to take McGann's notion of the "textual condition" one step further than he does (among the many varied forms that a text takes is a form in which the text is not fluid at all, but perfectly absolute), and simultaneously extend Bateson's argument for one single, objective instance of the text with the claim that this is indeed one—but only one—way in which the text exists. These two modes of a text's existence—open and closed—are both at all times entirely true and real. This is neither a contradiction nor a paradox nor a destabilization of a hierarchy. It is simply, impossibly, how literature works. A copy with a flaw is and is not the text; any copy

at all is and is not the text; the text is and is not certain words in a certain order—and these contradictions exist in a perfectly stable, and indeed invisible, way.

The best illustration of this stable sort of opposition can perhaps be found in the pages of *Le chiendent* itself (whatever that means). The first sentence reads "The silhouette of a man appeared, in profile . . ." (OC 2: 3); so does the next-to-last sentence (247). The silhouette of the first sentence will become Étienne Marcel; the silhouette of the next-to-last sentence is what Étienne Marcel reverts to after the events of the novel have been erased by Mme Cloche. But are the two silhouettes one and the same? The second silhouette is the result of a complicated production (all the events of the novel lead up to its apparition, and so can be seen as participating in its being), and this process thus distinguishes it from the first: the second silhouette is the first plus everything that has happened in the novel. They are thus two distinct silhouettes. But Queneau tells us precisely that everything that has happened in the novel has now no longer happened: Étienne, Cloche, and Saturnin never met, for instance (247). And so the thing that distinguishes the two silhouettes was never a thing at all, and the two silhouettes are one and the same. It might be argued that for the reader those things *have* happened, except that one part of the reader's experience has to have involved the reading of the sentence that says those things never did happen, so it is just as possible to say that for the reader those things never happened. Queneau is thus asking us to believe in an impossibility: that these two silhouettes, which we know to be different because we have read of the experience that turned the first into the second, are in fact the same, because that experience never took place. Any attempt to simplify this contradiction—to say that the events of the novel did or did not happen—would be to miss the point. The second silhouette is a copy of the first, and it is just as true to say that the copy is dif-

ferent from the original because it is a copy as it is to say that the copy is the same as the original because it is a copy. Each silhouette is a copy and an original at the same time, and their differences are meaningful and meaningless at the same time. This is the way of the other book. It is and is not the book, and for this reason it undoes every *singular* conception of the novel and its workings. It does not undo the novel, or reading, or interpretation. It simply shows us something about novels that we might not have seen otherwise, something surprising and even wondrous: the novel's stubborn, unreasonable, beautiful resistance to definition. I began this chapter by claiming to have read Raymond Queneau's novel *Le chiendent*; I still don't know exactly what I mean by that.

2 MANUSCRIPT

NOR, FOR THAT MATTER, DO I KNOW what happens in *Le chiendent*.

That's not meant as a *boutade*, and certainly not as an admission of readerly incompetence or inattention. I have, after all, read *Le chiendent*, whatever that means, and so I do know what happens, but as I've just noted, what that means is that I *don't* know what happens, for the novel's last few paragraphs tell us quite unambiguously that everything we have just seen did not actually happen. It's all been erased, so thoroughly that Cloche, Étienne, and Saturnin not only no longer know each other but never did know each other: "They parted ways without a word, for they no longer knew each other, never having met" (247). We should note the full meaning of this: it's not merely another twist in the plot, but an erasure of the plot. Prior to page 247 we can say that certain things have happened, but after that page, if we are to take the novel seriously, we must say that among the things that have happened is the fact that nothing has happened—and indeed, since the erasure of all that has happened is the very last thing to happen, we can probably say only that what has happened is that nothing has happened. Étienne and the ducks, the Gallo-Etruscan war: did that happen or not? Is it in the novel or not? Not if we are to believe the novel itself. Only by refusing to give the event of the

erasure of all previous events the status of an event equal to all the other events in the novel can we claim that those other events genuinely are events.

And while we're on the subject of things happening, we should note another curious truth embedded in that phrase "never having met." The novel does indeed begin before Étienne has met Cloche or Saturnin, but not before Cloche and Saturnin have met: they are, after all, brother and sister. I can see two possible ways of dealing with this uncomfortable truth. We might, first, assume that the novel's final erasure affects not only the events narrated in the novel but even events from a time in the characters' lives before the action of the novel begins (before the birth of Cloche and Saturnin, or before their parents' meeting, or their birth, or *their* parents' birth, and on and on). But this solution doesn't quite work, given the words that directly follow the erasure: "A concierge settled into his rooms, a midwife hung out her shingle" (247). With those words, Cloche and Saturnin (assuming that these two figures are in fact Cloche and Saturnin) are already adults, already in the situation where we found them at the beginning of the novel, so clearly nothing prior to that beginning has been wiped out. We might thus do better to make a second assumption: that these two *became* brother and sister at some point in the narration itself (with the first lines of the novel? with the first mention of their siblinghood?). Cloche and Saturnin are inventions of a novelist's language, not real people, so it would be possible to say that they acquire their selfhood (including their family history) only in the language of the novel, and not before it. This seems a more sophisticated explanation than the first, and a more coherent one, but it poses problems of its own, not only because it forces us to fix the origin of the two characters' relationship at some specific moment, but also, more troublingly, because it contradicts itself: if at some point they become brother and sister, at which point they do not

meet but *have already met*, then their meeting is precisely the kind of action prior to the events of the novel that we just dismissed as too suggestive of the false idea that the characters of the text are real people. Put it this way: if their having met is a fact that comes into being at some point in the novel's narration, then does their meeting happen in the novel? Is it in the novel? If so, then we are treating them not as textual creations but as people, and we would further have to accept that a great many other events in their lives are also in the novel (their birth, their childhood, their parents' meeting, and on back infinitely, as with the first assumption); if not, then it becomes difficult to say in what way we can claim that they have in fact met, and so particularly difficult to understand why one of the things erased at the end is their meeting.

Thus, the brilliant, too-easily-overlooked ending of *Le chien-dent*, even as it erases everything that has happened, poses the impossible question of how to separate, among those erased events, what is in the text and what is not. And it is precisely this kind of quandary that the manuscripts of *Le chien-dent* force us to confront, again and again. The manuscripts show us many events that we know from the novel itself, of course, but also many events that do not appear in the text, and in this latter case it is at least possible to wonder what sort of relation they have to the text. To be sure, as with the nature of the copy, it also is possible *not* to wonder. Just as we might conclude that the question of Cloche and Saturnin's meeting is of no practical importance, it is possible to see the discarded manuscript material merely as something that no longer belongs to the novel once it has been published, but I'm afraid I am not a sufficiently disengaged reader to adopt that stance. I cannot simply separate those drafts from the text, because as I read those discarded sections I feel exactly as I do reading the novel. I recognize the characters, the settings, the tone, *the novel*, present there in a place that is not, by any definition, where the novel is.

When I read the name "Narcense," for example, I find it impossible not to see the character who goes by that name in the novel, and when I see him performing actions different from those of the novel, I find it impossible not to see those actions as actions that have something to do with the novel. Indeed, I find it difficult to dismiss the feeling, at once insistent and uncertain, that such events might well have happened in the novel, or might still be happening, or could happen, or something along those lines—an impression difficult to express but no less powerful for all that.

The very idea is ridiculous, I know. When I think of *Le chient* I first picture a series of events, and, just as when I say "The Red Wheelbarrow" I am referring to a poem that contains some words and not others, when I say "*Le chient*" I am referring to a text that contains some events and not others. Hence my disorientation: my habits as a reader compel me to read the manuscript passages as I would read any other sort of passage from *Le chient*, and my belief in the definability of the text forbids me from doing so. In the end, my habits as a reader inevitably win out, but with that victory comes, in the more rational part of my mind, the sense that somehow the relationship of those events to the novel itself should not be treated quite so cavalierly, that it really should be examined, perhaps explained, but at any rate closely considered, with all the fascination it deserves.

My delight in these curious manuscript events is not an entirely eccentric one; I believe that what so intrigues me about them is at least in part the way in which the experience of reading them mirrors my experience of *Le chient* itself. As I've said, the last lines force us to wonder what exactly can be said to have happened in the course of that novel; a reading of the manuscripts poses that question in a still more radical way, which can easily be extended beyond this one book. What, after all, happens in any novel? How do we separate what happens from what doesn't? What do we

mean by "happens," anyway? I suggested in the previous chapter that a novel can be seen as a set of events and as a set of words; having found the "set of words" model deeply troubled, I hope here to suggest that our notion of the novel's events—what they must be, can be, and must not be—itself becomes oddly and even impossibly uncertain if we take the manuscript seriously, if we allow the events it describes to be events, if we read the manuscript as text and not as something that precedes and hence lies outside the text. Not, in other words, as *avant-texte*, a term that nonetheless deserves a moment's consideration.

IS AN AVANT-TEXTE A TEXT?

It is, if you think about it, surprisingly (and perhaps *significantly*) difficult to come up with a good word to describe material written in the course of the preparation of a novel but not present in the published novel itself. I have been calling such material "the manuscripts," believing the term to be clear enough for my purpose, but of course it's not a particularly accurate word. To one ear it implies all manner of early drafts, close to or wildly divergent from the final text; to another, in the singular at least, it might mean only the definitive draft submitted to the publisher (almost certainly not handwritten, despite the word's evident meaning). Hence the less ambiguous term *avant-texte*, defined by Jean Bellemain-Noël as "the assemblage composed of the rough drafts, the manuscripts, the proofs, the 'variants,' seen from the standpoint of *that which materially precedes* a work when this latter is considered as a *text*, and *which interacts with it systemically*" (15; emphasis in original). The term thus usefully and clearly groups together a wide range of materials involved in the production of a written work; it nevertheless grates on my ear, because what I see when I read the manuscripts of *Le chient* is not something that "precedes the text," or that led to the text, or that allowed the text to

be born. Perhaps it is all that, but it is not *purely* that: a passage of text from a manuscript is *also text* (it can be read, understood, enjoyed in precisely the same manner as any other text). Perhaps it is not exactly *the* text, but it is unquestionably text associated with the text; why should we not allow it to exist as text just as the text does? Bellemin-Noël considers this point, wondering, "For that matter, what does it mean for a text to exist? In what way does a 'first draft' exist less than a finished work?" But no sooner has he posed this troublesome question than he dispenses with it. The *avant-texte* is (in part) composed of material the author judged unsuited to the text, he tells us, and the author made that decision for a reason: "Manifestly, what does not fit is what cannot be smoothly integrated with the whole, what refuses to harmonize with the portion of the text that is already there and the portion that remains to be produced" (6). The *avant-texte* is thus material unsuited to the text, but it remains that which allowed the text to come into being; it is "the fluid, the colloidal medium, in which the units of language seek and find their connections by way of the lines of optimal signification" (62). It creates the text, but it is not the text, and perhaps not even text: it's a medium, and at the same time a sort of trash heap.

Bellemin-Noël's formulation, like the term *avant-texte* itself, suggests a clear separation between the final text and the manuscript material, a separation that I think might best be viewed with skepticism. It presents the text as closed off, autonomous, immutable—which, as I have already argued, is in part what the text is, but only in part. The *texte* in *avant-texte* is thus a troublesome word, but so is the *avant*. For one thing, it is entirely possible to read the manuscripts *after* having read the text (indeed, this is the most common way of reading them), and so to experience them, in our understanding of the novel, not as something discarded but as something added. For another, when a manuscript passage is

experienced in that way it becomes possible to wonder whether the passage really has come to an end, whether the text really has struck it out or rendered it moot or mute, whether the passage does not have a certain existence of its own, and whether it is not in part a part of the text, or in part the text.

It is the ambiguity of the last few words of that sentence that I'd like to consider in this chapter, along with the apparent impossibility of resolving that ambiguity. A quick example will illustrate what I mean. Readers of *Le chiendent* will remember a scene from late in the novel in which Hippolyte and Le Toltec discuss, with naive nationalism, the state of the Gallo-Etruscan war (226–28). The manuscripts include a draft of a very similar scene, also set in Hippolyte's bar, but here Hippolyte's interlocutors are three characters whom we scarcely see in the published text: Meussieu Exossé, Cléopastor, and Poulèche. This trio rushes in with the news that "The French troops have entered Swisserland" (CDRQ cl. 42c: 130). Using Hippolyte's map, Exossé "explains Bonaparte's Etruscan campaign. And that Maréchal Végant is going to do the same thing" (CDRQ cl. 42c: 131). A second draft of this scene explains the threefold goal of this invasion: first, to cut off the enemy troops; second, to prevent Etruria from committing the heinous crime of not respecting Switzerland's neutrality; and third, to force Switzerland to recognize its own neutrality, for the Swiss are suspected of secretly aiding the Etruscans (CDRQ cl. 42c: 139).

An interesting and mildly funny little development, this, but one that Queneau clearly found not worth including (just as Bellemin-Noël says) in his final draft. No doubt the reasons for this exclusion would be interesting to know, but to use this passage for that kind of discussion requires a kind of second-degree reading, bracketing the events narrated so as to consider only what the narrator chose to do with his narration (as if *avant-texte* material's ultimate signified were always to be found outside the words of the passage

itself). It is possible to read the text that way, but what I see when I read this passage is an event, just as I do when I read a passage in a published novel. I see something happening, no less than I picture a cat sitting on a mat when I hear the sentence "The cat sat on the mat," and in neither case do I find that mental image blameworthy, even if I understand that "The cat sat on the mat" and this manuscript passage can well be used for purposes other than the representation of an imaginary or real reality. I understand that, and yet I also picture the reality thereby potentially represented. In short, when I come across a passage like this, I *read* it, and my perception of its content works precisely as it does when I read a passage in a published text: the words become pictures, the pictures combine to form events. Having read the passage, I can now speak of it, and I speak of it as if it were an event, as if it happened, just as I would speak of a passage from *Le chiendent* itself, and just as I would picture that novel as a whole if someone were to speak its title before me. The material we find in a published novel and the material we find in a manuscript differ neither in their composition (the text is made up of text—words, in association—and so, after all, is this passage, which means that I don't see how it could be claimed that the *avant-texte* is made up of anything other than text) nor in the reaction they elicit from the reader, for either can be read in such a way as to produce the impression of an event—or in any other way, of course, as words written by a specific author, as an example of narrative discourse, and so on.

But what makes up this passage is not simply undifferentiated text; it's text I recognize as somehow related to *Le chiendent*, a relationship I would in theory recognize even if I'd encountered this passage with no context to define it. I would, that is, recognize the characters (or at least their names), the setting, the situation, and the ironic distance of the narration, all of which would fit in seamlessly with that "essence of *Le chiendent*" I alluded to at the

start of the previous chapter. In other words, this passage is not exactly different from *Le chiendent*, but neither, since this scene does not take place in the book itself, is it exactly the same thing. For the moment, I will go no further than this. I will say only that the difficulty of defining the nature of this little passage suggests that there is something troublesome and odd about a manuscript passage, a refusal to occupy in a convincing way either the category of that which is not the novel or the category of that which is (a refusal that it shares, furthermore, with the copy).

Perhaps, then, we should consider the possibility that the *avant-texte* is not walled off from the text, but can, like the copy, "be" the text to varying degrees—that the *avant-texte*'s belonging to the text occupies, again, a sort of continuum. The proofs created for the printing of the text itself, after all authorial and editorial corrections have been entered in, are to some very high degree the text, though not, as I've argued, completely, since it is not to those proofs that we refer when we say "*Le chiendent*." The final manuscript, prior to all editorial emendations and authorial changes of heart, is less the text than those proofs, but still identifiably *Le chiendent*, sharing most of its words and events with what we call *Le chiendent*. And the draft before that? Also *Le chiendent*, to a lesser degree. And before that, and before that? Still less, but still yes. We could go straight back to the first words written down on a piece of paper—say simply the words "*Le chiendent*." Are those words *Le chiendent*? They don't have everything that *Le chiendent* has—they're only two words, after all—although they're words common to the novel and this sheet of paper. They're not all of *Le chiendent*, then, but they're part of it; however little they share with the novel itself, they're still visibly of that novel, like the war between Gaul and Etruria, like the names "Hippolyte," "Cléopas-tor," and "Pourlèche." We can at least say that that little piece of paper with the words "*Le chiendent*" on it is more *Le chiendent*

than, say, a check that Queneau might have written to his dry-cleaners. It is more *Le chiendent* than the page you are now reading. It is more *Le chiendent* than anything but the later manuscripts and the text itself. Thus it is to some degree, however slight, *Le chiendent*.

Hence, clearly, the insufficiency of the term and the concept *avant-texte*. To claim that any set of words that does not appear as a published volume constitutes something other than "text" or "the text" is to attribute to that volume a strangely literal sort of force and to attribute to the merely written word a similar sort of weakness, as if something about the act of publication conferred on those words a reality and a solidity that they did not have before. It is true that a published volume is not the same thing as a sheaf of handwritten pages—that's precisely why I say I am referring to the published volume when I refer to *Le chiendent*—but the real difference is that a certain context is added to the words of the manuscript when it is published. That context has meaning (thus, in the academic world, a published article is seen as superior to an unpublished one, and even to a forthcoming one), but surely that context doesn't determine the value of a given set of words. Unless we are prepared to claim that text only signifies when it been given some sort of official seal of recognition (unless, that is, we don't really believe in language and writing), we must accept that a manuscript has a certain power to signify and that it cannot be comfortably classed simply as something that temporarily signified (if that) before the true signifier was produced.

And the last phrase of the sentence I've just written suggests another difficulty with the idea of the *avant-texte*. If the passage we've just been considering can safely be classified as *avant-texte*, it's not clear to me when it *became* that. Was it text when it was written? If so, when and how did it become something other than text? In order to consider those questions, let's turn to another

abandoned passage, one that briefly evokes the horrific results of an Etruscan bombing raid on the chemical factory at Blangy: "The wind wafted pretty rust-colored clouds into Obonne, resulting in the thorough elimination of the greater part of the populace" (CDRQ cl. 42c: 144). Like the first manuscript passage, this clearly can be thought of as "some *Chiendent*": we recognize the narrator's detachment and gloomy humor (elements of that essence-of-*Le chiendent* I evoked earlier), and the event described is precisely of the kind that marks the book's cataclysmic final sections. I can see no way in which it fails to "harmonize" with what comes before or after it in the story, to use Bellemin-Noël's term; I see no reason why this bombing could not have happened in the book. If it had appeared in the published text, none of the novel's subsequent events would have been rendered impossible (assuming that the inhabitants of the Marcel house and a few other residents of Obonne are not among the dead), and the nature of the novel would not have been palpably different. I would go further: I see no reason why this event could not *still be happening* in the novel. That is, as I read of this bombing, I can readily imagine it as one episode in the Gallo-Etruscan war, one of what must be an innumerable number of episodes that the narrator does not bother to describe, but that must be the sort of thing that happens—after all, *something* has to have reduced the population of France virtually to zero by the novel's last section ("there wasn't much of anyone still on their feet" [243]). Yet somehow this bit of text is not text, and so, to reiterate the question I posed earlier, when did it become *avant-texte*?

I can think of two possible answers, the first of which is that it never was text. Queneau writes that sentence as part of his novel in progress, but the sentence is not yet text in the context of that work. Indeed, at this point (when the work is still in progress), *nothing* he writes can be text, for the simple reason that the novel,

which is the context in which such sentences could be text, does not yet exist. No novel, no text in or of the novel. Only when the novel exists can the sentences and events that make it up be said to be text. But if that's the argument we're going to make, we should be able to pinpoint the moment when the novel can be said to exist. It exists, I suppose, when it finds its definitive form. And when is that? When the final draft is completed? No, changes are still possible. When proofs are printed up? No, for the same reason. When the author signs the "authorization to print" form? When he or she begins signing it, finishes signing it, formulates an intention to sign it? Or perhaps not until the publisher receives that form, or perhaps not until the book itself is printed (until the first copy is printed? or all the copies? not until they're bound? only when they've been sent out to the shops? or not until they appear on the shelves? or until someone first buys a copy? or reads it?). I try to imagine the precise moment when the novel is complete, real, and I can't. And this matters, because that would be the moment when *avant-texte* becomes text. If such a moment is unimaginable, then I think it would be a mistake to use it as a basis for distinguishing text from *avant-texte*, as we must if we assume that nothing written before the novel's completion can really count as text.

So the other answer to the question must be the right one: a word is indeed text until such time as the author comes to delete it from the work. The sentence describing the bombing of the factory was thus text when Queneau wrote it (it was a thing that was going to happen in the novel, as the novel existed in Queneau's mind), but it became *avant-texte* when he decided to leave it out of the final draft (it ended up not happening). This seems a far more plausible scenario, and indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, it is the very one that Bateson proposes. Let us thus imagine a bit more explicitly the process that Bateson so summarily evokes. I, the author, read through my manuscript one final time, and when I

consider a sentence worthy of retention in the final draft, that sentence suddenly becomes text. Now suppose I deem a sentence valid but then, a few pages further on, suddenly realize the sentence requires some sort of change, which I then go back and enact. Was that sentence text between the moment it was pronounced valid and the moment it was revised? Or, since in hindsight we can see that the sentence in question was destined to revert to *avant-texte*, was it in fact always *avant-texte*, even as I was pronouncing it text? In any case, however we answer that question, we would have to put off the moment when the potential text becomes the real text: it happens not gradually, as the author is rereading, but only when he or she has completed the entire process of revision. Or perhaps not until the author has died, since it's always possible to revise a book long after its first publication (Queneau did precisely this, on a very modest scale, for a republication of *Le chiendent* in 1968, thirty-five years after its first appearance [see, for instance, OC 2: 1476 n. 9]). And we must also wonder what happens if the author *forgets* to go back and emend the sentence in question. Does it remain text even though for the author it has become *avant-texte*? Or is it now something in the novel that's not supposed to be in the novel, a flaw—forever destined to go unnoticed—in the novel's signifying process? Let's not dwell too long on these conundrums; rather, let us note that conundrums are the inevitable result if we assume that there is some moment at which text becomes non-text (or, as we saw earlier, at which non-text becomes text); and, let us recall, if we believe in *avant-texte* we must believe in the existence of such a moment.

Our attempts to explain how this passage became *avant-texte* having failed, let us now consider another way of approaching it. *Avant-texte* or not, there's no reason why the gassing of the inhabitants of Obonne could not (still) be in the novel, why this passage could not simply be "more text." This bombing is, as I say, exactly

the kind of thing that the book's final sections depict: "Military and civilian populations tramped through the mud, seasoned with missiles and poison gas," the narrator tells us. Indeed, as he writes a few lines later, "In Obonne life went on, sweet and mindless, apparently quite serene. In reality, a great many things were happening." The extermination of the greater part of Obonne's population does not figure in the list of events he then enumerates, but as he himself tells us, those events are only "examples" (239). I would be willing to bet that, had I not told you that this sentence does not appear in that novel, you would have been perfectly willing to believe that it does—proof not of your bad memory or deficient reading, but only of the plausibility of this event in the novel as we know it. And then there is the place-name *Obonne* as well as the chemical factory (many times referred to in the novel itself) and the Etruscans: even if we are willing to grant that the event described is *avant-texte*, these elements common to the manuscript passage and to the novel seem less easily dismissed. Surely the name *Obonne* is not *avant-texte* in this passage, whatever that might mean. At the most basic level, that name simply tells us that there is in this novel a place called Obonne, independent of any actions that might or might not take place there, and that does not change from the manuscript to the definitive text; thus, a passage containing the name *Obonne* cannot easily be denied some sort of status as text, unless we are prepared to argue that what Queneau means by *Obonne* in the manuscript passage is not exactly what he means by that name in the novel itself. And this is in fact a very appealing answer, not least because it allows us not to ask the very sorts of questions we have just been asking, and so to assume that the sentence is true in its own context (that of the manuscripts) but not in the context of the novel itself.

We'll turn to that theory in a moment, after a quick summary

of the reasons why I have spun out this discussion. First, I wish to dispel from the outset any sort of thinking that conveniently makes the manuscript "not the text," which claims that the manuscript is an object of no *narrative* power once the definitive draft is completed. Second, I want to suggest that the text-in-progress, while perhaps less the text than the definitive text, may well remain to some degree the text. Third, I want to suggest that a written word might continue to signify even after it has been superseded by other written words. Fourth, I want to make clear that a manuscript does not exist solely as "that which preceded the novel." The novel is already in it, and remains in it even after the text has been published.

If we are willing to grant those four interrelated points, then we must conclude that this small passage, which has no real equivalent in the text—or does it? is one version of a discussion about the progress of a war not in some sense the equivalent of another?—is at once not *Le chiendent* and *Le chiendent* (more *Le chiendent* than something written in some context other than that of the writing of *Le chiendent*, more than any text that does not mention the Gallo-Etruscan war, and so on). At the very least, the intertextual relationship between this passage and *Le chiendent* is a very, very strong one, far stronger than the novel's relationship with *Gilgamesh* or *Lolita*, for instance, and indeed stronger even than its relationship with, say, the *Discours de la méthode*.

But an intertextual relationship is not necessarily a relationship of belonging; the fact that there is such a relationship between this manuscript text and the novel does not necessarily mean that the events of the manuscript can really be worked into the events of the novel. Can they? That is a vast question, and one we can only discuss by way of a consideration of what is true and not true in fiction.

Let us now take up another, longer passage, perhaps one of the most intriguing discoveries to be found in *Le chiendent*'s manuscripts. From what precedes and follows it in the relevant draft—two passages virtually identical to the corresponding sections in the published novel—we can assume that this episode was once meant to serve as the second section of chapter 2, the spot occupied, in the published text, by the account of Narcense's train journey to his grandmother's funeral (34–37). The manuscript passage shows us Narcense en route to that same ceremony, but in very different circumstances. He seems to have arrived after dark in an unnamed town where he plans to spend the night before taking another train the next day. He sets out in search of a hotel he remembers, but soon becomes hopelessly lost. (Here a crossed-out passage shows him glimpsing but avoiding a group of soldiers watching over a square; in the distance, he thinks he hears gunfire.) Still searching in vain for his hotel, he happens onto a brothel and enters. To his surprise, he finds no one in the bar downstairs, which bears all the hallmarks of some recent violent altercation: overturned tables, broken chairs, shattered bottles, and “here and there puddles of beer or wine or blood” (CDRQ cl. 42c: 37). He goes upstairs, looks through the empty rooms, and finally lies down to sleep in one of them, but under the bed he glimpses “a hand with clenched fingers” (and these words are followed by the crossed-out notation “a closed fist”), apparently belonging to a corpse. He finds another room and spends a restless night. When morning comes he checks on the corpse again, finds it still there, heads downstairs, drinks a glass of rum, steals a few hundred-franc notes from the till, and goes out. Walking back to the train station, he runs into a group of soldiers on patrol, who demand that he produce his papers and explain his reason for being there. He tells them he's on his

way to a funeral; the soldiers let him go, though he runs into two further patrols, and undergoes two similar interrogations, before he finally reaches the station. “On the square in front of the station,” the passage concludes, “men in helmets were keeping the peace” (CDRQ cl. 42c: 38).

There is much that I find remarkable about this passage, but what strikes me particularly is the atmosphere of civil unrest and martial law, the air of a society (or at least of one town) sliding into violent anarchy. There is nothing similar to be found in the pages of *Le chiendent* itself; one might perhaps imagine such a breakdown in the novel's final sections, but there's no indication that life in Gaul has really grown quite as brutish as this, and in any case the events described in this manuscript passage take place long before those of the novel's final chapter. And this, it seems to me, changes everything: what kind of novel was the version that contained this scene going to be? More to the point, what was the world depicted by that novel going to be? Surely the societal breakdown depicted here would have appeared again, would have perhaps colored or shaped the later events, but how, and what would those later events have been? I thus find this a highly disruptive passage; it suggests a *Chiendent* that could have been very different from what it is. And we should not treat that “could have been” too dismissively: a novel that could have been very different from what it is seems to me somehow different from one that could not have been, and a world that could have been (and at one point was) very different is not the same thing as a world that could not. Such a novel and such a world seem to me less sure, less solid, less themselves than they might have been had they taken the same unchanging form from the beginning.

In *The Limits of Interpretation*, Umberto Eco presents a case for dismissing any potential effect of a passage such as this, more or less along the lines of the argument that what is true in the context

of the manuscript is not true in the context of the novel. (Eco's discussion does not explicitly touch on the subject of manuscripts, but his idea will work here all the same.) For Eco, every narrative act creates a possible world, concerning which certain statements can be said to be true and others false (it is, for instance, a false statement to say that, in the world created by the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes is married [72]). Characters within those possible worlds are defined by their relationship to other characters; thus, "in the narrative world W_n of *Madame Bovary* there is no other way to identify Emma than as the wife of Charles, who in turn has been identified as the boy seen by the Narrator at the beginning of the novel. Any other world in which Madame Bovary were the wife of the baldest King of France would be another (non-Flaubertian) world, furnished with different individuals" (73). Eco terms this necessary relationship of one character to another an "S-property," defined as "a property which is necessary inside a given possible world by virtue of the mutual definition of the figures in play" (73)—necessary, in this case, because a novel in which Emma is not married to Charles cannot be *Madame Bovary*. These S-properties have a powerfully determinative force: thus, "a heretic Gospel telling the story of a man called Jesus who is not the Son of the Father does not speak about the same theological character as the Canonic Gospels" (132–33). Extrapolating from this theory, we may assume that the narrator of this manuscript, in which Narcense has a certain relationship with a corpse, is not speaking of the Narcense we find in the novel, who has no such relationship, and thus that the world of the manuscript passage is a different possible world from that of the novel. Different narrative worlds, Eco tells us, are "not narratively accessible" (132): the events of the one cannot intrude into the other. If we accept that notion, then this passage loses all disruptive force. It is talking about a world with no relationship to the world of the novel,

and so its events cannot compel us to rethink our understanding of the novel.

It's difficult to disagree with Eco's formulation too violently, but certain aspects of it quietly cry out for argument. The very notion of the S-property strikes me as tenuous, for two reasons. For one thing, it doesn't seem to me sufficient: surely the character of Emma must have other qualities than her marriage to Charles in order for the narrative act that contains her to be *Madame Bovary* (that marriage must be a stifling one, Charles must not be a brilliant doctor, the couple must presumably have a child, Emma must have an erotic relationship with Rodolphe and another with Léon, and so on). But perhaps Eco does not mean to say that this S-property is the *only* element of the novel that makes it what it is; in that case, though, if we keep piling on more necessary qualities (Emma must commit suicide, she must try to learn Italian) we will eventually conclude that what is necessary for this world to be that of *Madame Bovary* is simply everything that is in the novel itself, and so we fall into the tautological argument that what makes *Madame Bovary* *Madame Bovary* is the fact that it is *Madame Bovary*. There's certainly no arguing with that, but I'm prepared to argue with it anyway. It reproduces one half of the double existence of the novel that I posited at the beginning of this book—that a novel is both an immutable sequence of events and a mutable set of impressions—but as I hope to have suggested, that is indeed only half of the equation. But neither, I think, is the S-property really *necessary*. In the first place, it is clearly *not* essential that Emma be married to Charles for the narrative act that contains her to be *Madame Bovary*, since in the beginning she isn't married to him—she hasn't even met him. As it turns out, she does marry him, of course, but to assume that as the story begins she is in some sense already married to him is to suppose that all the events of a novel happen together, like the events of a painting, for instance, which

is, again, only *one* way in which a novel exists. Furthermore, suppose that Emma had not married Charles, but someone else—say a local farmer named Dupont, equally obtuse, equally unexciting. Is it so certain that the novel resulting from this marriage would have been palpably different from the one we know? The words would have been different, and the specific events, but perhaps not the *kind* of events, nor the end, nor the general impression (as Flaubert himself says, there is more than one way to evoke the “mold-colored existence of the wood-louse” in the reader’s mind [Goncourt and Goncourt 367]). *Madame Dupont* would not be *Madame Bovary*, but if Flaubert had given us the former novel rather than the latter, we would never have suspected that Emma Dupont is actually an impostor—she wouldn’t be one—and much of what we say of the real novel we could no doubt also say of the other. Equally troublesome is Eco’s Jesus example, first because I am not sure what Eco means when he says those two texts would not be talking about the same *theological* figure (wouldn’t the heretical text be talking about a figure who is not theological at all?), and second because I think that they *are* the same theological figure, since surely one of Jesus’ most essential qualities is that not everyone recognizes him as the son of God: the narrator of the heretical text would simply be one such person.

I will quibble no further; my goal here is only to suggest that the question is far less simple and straightforward than Eco makes it sound. But what of his larger point, that the world depicted in a manuscript passage such as this is simply not the world of the text, and that there can be no communication between them? Here too, I can’t help thinking that Eco’s formulation seems too neat. In part, this is because it fails to make any room for my experience as a reader. It expects me to look at the Narcense of this passage and to see him as a different Narcense from the Narcense I know, and I’m simply unable to do so. As a reader, I *recognize* him: apart

from that fact that I am seeing him in a setting that the novel never shows us, I can find nothing that distinguishes him in any way from the Narcense of the novel (which is scarcely surprising, since, in Queneau’s mind, at one point at least, he was indeed that Narcense: Eco’s idea becomes remarkably difficult to swallow once it is applied to two real texts written by the same hand, in the context of the same story). Worse yet, as I read the manuscript alone, I’m unable to keep my Narcenses straight. If Eco’s idea is right, then the name *Narcense* on one line in the manuscripts refers to the character of the novel (if the manuscript passage is identical to the words of the novel, which is the case in the manuscript passages immediately preceding and following this one), and then, a few lines later, it refers to a different character. But then, recalling the apparent idea that Emma is already married to Charles even as a young girl (because she is going to be married to him eventually), we must conclude that in the manuscript passage preceding this one, which is identical to the text of the novel, Narcense is already engaged in the brothel scene, and so that preceding manuscript passage already depicts a world different from that of the novel, even though the passage does not differ from the published version in any way. Perhaps, then, we must assume that *all* the manuscript references are speaking of that other Narcense, and only the references in the published novel refer to the real Narcense—which is to say, once again, that only the published version of a text is the real one, in which case the question of when a text is published and so when a passage becomes real once again raises its ugly head.

And there is another reason why my experience prevents me from seeing Eco’s formulation as a useful one: the published novel seems to allude to the very brothel scene that Queneau chose to omit. For one thing, we know from the novel that Narcense’s trip to Marcheville will require him to change trains in the town of Torny (“I’m going as far as Torny,” he tells Bébé Toutout [36]),

and this allusion to an intermediary stop on his way to Marcheville does correspond to what we find in the manuscript passage. But this is mere circumstantial evidence; there is a more explicit link between the novel and the events of this episode. Later reminded by Étienne of his friend Potice's demise, Narcense falls into an anguished meditation on death in general, a preoccupation that has already been troubling him for several hours, as that very morning, "in the half-sleep preceding his awakening, he thought he had seen a clenched hand in front of his window" (84). Does this "clenched hand" represent Narcense's memory of the "hand with clenched fingers" or "closed fist" of the brothel scene? At the very least, it *could*; certainly the image makes more overt sense if we assume that it does (that clenched hand would then constitute yet another in the series of deaths and near-deaths that immediately run through Narcense's mind), though the passage also makes sense if we know nothing of the brothel scene, in which case we would no doubt interpret the clenched fist merely as some vague presage of doom.

But if one of Narcense's determining characteristics is that a clenched hand makes him think of death (and in fact the novel has just made that very connection), then the brothel scene would fit perfectly into Eco's scheme, and would have to be a part of the same world as the novel—or at least the moment in which he sees the clenched hand would. I make no claims here one way or another. I simply want to show that Eco's theory cannot really account for what we find in the manuscript passage, and that the manuscripts undo such easy certainties about what does or does not happen in the world of the novel, and even the very notion of the world of the novel.

To be sure, whether we do so on the basis of Eco's possible-world theory or of our own intuitive suppositions, we can still read Narcense's adventures in that troubled town and assume that they have nothing to do with the reality of the novel, that they're

unconnected to the events of the book, and can thus be forgotten. If they were to be true, then they would disrupt the book as we understand it; the sanest solution is thus to say that they are not true, that they have no ontological status in the way that the events of the text do. But let us now place that episode in a different context: suppose we were to interpret it as a dream occupying Narcense's mind as he slumbers in the train on the way to Marcheville? The novel does give us some indication of a kind of half-sleep that overtakes him in the train (see, for example, pages 34–35); if this whole episode is simply a dream, or a fantasy—to which Narcense is also prone (see, for example, pages 117–21)—then it suddenly becomes less disturbing. It no longer represents a reality dramatically different from the reality of the novel; as a dream, it is far easier to assimilate into that latter reality, far more plausible as something that can potentially happen in the novel. And this means that we do *not* see this episode as entirely removed from the novel: we shove it to one side insofar as it conflicts with our understanding of the novel, but if it can be shown that it need not conflict with that understanding—if it can be fitted into the plot without disruption, as would be the case if this episode were a dream—we can sense some shift in our own perception of those events. Their degree of distance from the novel feels palpably different (they seem closer to the novel). And if the episode's degree of distance can be reduced, then clearly it is not irremediably distinct from the novel. If it can be made, through a change in context, to seem more a part of the possible world of the novel, then clearly it is not unambiguously removed from that possible world. I should repeat here that I do not mean to "refute" Eco's theory, which I find entirely reasonable on its own terms. I seek only to suggest a suspicion that the manuscript has a force that escapes such theories, and that we gain nothing by turning a blind eye to that force.

This suspicion becomes considerably more troublesome when we consider a manuscript passage that appears not to narrate an event more or less removed from the novel but rather to explain an event that does occur (but that is not fully explained) in the published text. There are more than a few such passages to be found in *Le chiendent*'s manuscripts. In one, Étienne tells Pierre that he suspects a neighbor of killing his cat, because his fellow Obonnians are put off by his half-built house (CDRQ cl. 42b: 52); in another (less believable, but funnier), Mme Cloche explains to Saturnin that Ernestine died of "empsoiriasis" (CDRQ cl. 42b: 40). But the most fascinating such passage concerns the fate of the blue door that lies at the center of this novel. As readers of *Le chiendent* will remember, Narcense and Saturnin eventually steal this door in hopes of uncovering its secret—a fruitless undertaking, as it turns out, whose precise nature is described in the most maddeningly vague terms. The novel tells us only that Narcense and Saturnin have made 91 attempts to "place the door" (216), which is to say to find "a destination worthy of it" (237), to discover "the way out" (216). This was an arduous undertaking, as Saturnin tells Étienne—"We trundled it from apartment to apartment, from chateau to manor house, from hotel to barracks, in hopes of discovering the missing room it went with" (237)—and an expensive one: "Research like that costs a lot of money" (216). We never directly see Narcense and Saturnin attempting to bring their plan to fruition; the closest we come is a transcription of Narcense's embittered musings after the last such attempt, which took place in the apartment of one Sophie Isis, a silent character who appears nowhere else in the novel and who lives in a town named Ça-Hisse-sur-Seine (216). That is all we know of Narcense and Saturnin's project, and it is not enough to allow us to piece together any real understanding of their idea or their actions: "place the door" in what sense? How exactly has "the missing room" be-

come "missing," and what exactly is meant by "missing" anyway? What sort of research is involved, and why should it be expensive? Why should there be exactly 91 ways of placing the door, and why should at least one of those ways involve a character curiously christened Sophie Isis, who lives in a town that sounds suspiciously like the French pronunciation of the name of the ancient Egyptian city of Sais (Calame 34)?

Of course, if Queneau doesn't tell us all this, it's because we're not supposed to know it. The ungraspability of the project and of the theory behind it is no doubt meant to echo the unknowability that motivates so much of *Le chiendent*, and so if as readers of the novel itself we do not fully understand what Narcense and Saturnin are up to, then we have perfectly understood what the novel is trying to show us. Clearly, though, at some point Queneau did think this episode worth explaining to the reader, for we find in the manuscripts a long, wonderfully funny passage that answers in copious and coherent detail every one of the questions I've just asked. It turns out that Narcense and Saturnin are visiting various dwellings to ask if the inhabitants might be missing a room, the theory being that when a room's door is removed the room ceases to be a room—not that the room simply loses its separation from the rest of the apartment and thus melds with it, but rather that the room becomes invisible and un-enterable. Here, then, is the precise and highly unlikely sense of the words "the missing room"—a sense so unlikely that I don't think it could be guessed from a scrutiny of the words contained in the published *Chiendent*. Once they locate the site of that onetime room, "we'll place our door in front of it, and that way we can go in. And no doubt the *contents* of the room thus *revealed* will be particularly interesting" (CDRQ cl. 42c: 167; emphasis in original): there, clearly, is what is meant by the words "place the door" in the definitive text. And why should there be precisely 91 possible sites for this missing room? In the

manuscript passage there are not 91 possibilities, but 165; nevertheless, the reasoning seems to fit neatly with what we find in the text: "According to our research, this door must have been lost by one of the five following people: Virginie Horus, Pierre Isis, Philippe Osiris, Jeanne Râ, or Claude Hermès. We're visiting all the lodgings that were occupied *or could have been occupied* by one of those five" (CDRQ cl. 42c: 168; emphasis in original). A bit further on we learn why they have targeted these particular personages: they are convinced that the owner is one of the descendants of a certain Octave Amon (CDRQ cl. 42c: 169). And with this the novel's allusion to Sophie Isis and her oddly named hometown becomes clearer: somehow, the Egyptian pantheon is connected with this episode, and Sophie is simply another example of that connection. Finally, Narcense and Saturnin learned of these possible sites for the missing room with the aid of a detective agency ("The Agence Pupille sees all, knows all, but understands nothing. Thank goodness," says Saturnin [CDRQ cl. 42c: 169]), and no doubt this is what the novel means when it alludes to the expense involved in this endeavor.

The manuscript passage thus has an answer for every one of the questions the text seems to raise, and, certain details aside (the fact that there are 165 possibilities rather than 91, the fact that Sophie Isis does not appear in the list of Octave Amon's descendants), those answers feel unmistakably like correct or true answers. If we take the manuscript passage to be true, then every one of the teasingly elliptical phrases with which the novel evokes this episode makes sense, and there is no dissonance between the manuscript passage and the novel (unlike the brothel scene, for instance, which introduces a situation of violent unrest that we do not recognize from the novel). In short, the novel really does seem to be evoking precisely this set of events and none other; its account is simply sparser than that of the manuscript. And so it

is very difficult not to conclude, once we've read the manuscript passage, that this is exactly how the scene in the novel happens, or indeed, to return to an idea already raised in the case of the brothel scene but which manifests itself much more sensibly here, that (with whatever changes) this scene *does in fact happen* in the novel.

I can find nothing in Eco's S-property to allay this impression. Saturnin and Narcense's relationship is unchanged, as are their respective relationships with the door (again, the manuscript simply shows us those same relationships in greater detail). Nevertheless, I can't help thinking that any attempt to see this manuscript passage as meaningful in the context of the novel would violate the spirit of Eco's theory, for a reader of narrative must simply take for granted the information offered by the narration, and not seek to determine (nor even to reflect on) the chain of events underlying it. We must accept that a wolf can speak in order to appreciate "Little Red Riding Hood"; there is no need to "reconsider the whole course of evolution" to account for that fact (*Limits* 76). Presumably, a similar injunction must hover over this passage in the novel: we must accept that Narcense and Saturnin attempted to discover the secret of the door in whatever way they did, without seeking the literal explanation. But what are we to do when we have what seems very like the literal explanation offered up to us so neatly? Simply refuse to look at it? That seems an absurd reaction, and suggests something uncomfortably close to a fear of the manuscript. Might some more rigorous sort of theory allow us to discount these events, to separate them convincingly from the events of the novel?

One place where we might seek such a theory is in the realm of textual ontology, a fascinating little field of study whose goal is precisely to determine what does and doesn't happen (or what is and what isn't true) in a work of fiction. Like Eco, textual

ontologists unfortunately (if not altogether surprisingly) exclude the manuscript from their meditations, but here too I believe we can extrapolate more or less usefully from their writings. They approach the question of what is true and what is false in a variety of manners, but I know of none who takes a harder line than Robert Champigny in his *Ontology of the Narrative*. Champigny tells us that a reader may well *interpret* a text, positing the work's themes or the psychology of its characters, but "his job is not to infer other events from those which are given. To do this would be to create another fictional world" (19). A work of fiction, he claims, can be compared to a soccer match, in which the only events that exist are those of the game itself: "The playing field is not, as such, geographically situated. The ball is not kicked into the net at 2:21 p.m. on December 12, 1957; but there may be a goal scored in the twentieth minute of play. What happens during the intermission and while playing stops does not count. Before the start of the game and after the end, there is nothing" (80-81). Similarly, in a novel, "no event is to be presumed outside those which the narration establishes without equivocation" (94). Champigny's definition of equivocation is a remarkably rigorous one; thus, if the novel shows us a tree covered with fruit but does not also tell us that this tree was covered with flowers a few months before, "we cannot specify that the tree . . . had blossomed, nor that it had not." To be sure, "an intimation of blossoming" comes with any reference to fruit, but "we are not entitled to project as event what is implicated" (97). If we are to trust Champigny, the fate of our manuscript passage could scarcely be clearer: it must be disregarded, for even if the novel's description of Narcense and Saturnin's search seems to imply precisely what the manuscript overtly says, the text does not unequivocally give us the details we find in the manuscript.

There is an impressive epistemological severity to Champigny's

solution, but it strikes me as less coherent than it seems at first glance. Like Eco, Champigny uses examples that don't really stand up to scrutiny, first among them that of the soccer match. If, in the minutes preceding the start of play, all the players on one side are slaughtered in their locker room by their opponents, surely that "counts," surely that is not "nothing" in the context of the game itself. Perhaps the game would simply be scored as forfeited, but no doubt an asterisk would be added to that result in the record books—for one thing, the record would have to indicate which team forfeited the match (the killers or their victims?), and that question could only be decided with reference to events that did not take place on the field (although perhaps, if the referees were dedicated followers of Champigny's system, they would conclude that the players lying dead before them had never actually been killed). The case of the fruit tree is more bothersome still. Clearly, Champigny's aim is to allow the fruit tree to be simply what the novel says it is, and nothing more. But that is precisely what his model makes impossible, for it unavoidably changes the tree's nature, and, without meaning to, confers on it a status that the text explicitly does not. If it cannot be said of this tree that it flowered or did not flower, then it is a tree unlike any other on earth (for of every other tree we can say that it flowered if it is covered with fruit). But if the novel does not explicitly tell us that this is a tree unlike any other on earth, then, by Champigny's own rules, we have no right to assume that it is. By attempting to confine the tree's existence to the explicit, limited reality of the novel's world, Champigny in fact expands that reality in a way that his own thinking forbids.

Nonetheless, Champigny's theory at least provides an unambiguous answer to the question of what we can do with this manuscript passage: nothing. What the text does not tell us cannot be considered true or false, and thus cannot exist. But here what we

might call the "fruit-tree fallacy" comes into play: to suppose that Narcense and Saturnin's project is not one that we *do* not understand but one that we *cannot* understand is to add to it a quality that it does not have in the text (where it is, I repeat, something that we *could* understand, but *don't*). Only if the narration explicitly told us that this is a project that cannot be understood would Champigny's theory not add to it a quality it does not have in the text. Too, however reasonable it may seem in the abstract, Champigny's edict that in a novel "no event is to be presumed outside those which the narration establishes without equivocation" proves diabolically difficult to respect in practice: does this mean that we cannot presume that the words "a concierge" in the book's final lines (247) refer to Saturnin? The text does not tell us "without equivocation" that they do, but is it not clear all the same? The most obvious and egregious failing of Champigny's theory is that it makes reading itself all but impossible; however convincing its rigor might appear on the surface, it acquires that quality only by turning a blind eye to the connotative nature of the language of fictional narration. How much is established "without equivocation" in any literary work (and particularly in Queneau's)? Or, to turn the question around, is it not true that in the case of Narcense and Saturnin's quest the words of the published text *do* explain this project unequivocally, if (and, admittedly, only if) we understand what those words mean (from the manuscript)? But that "if" should not be seen as a concession to Champigny's theory: after all, any utterance can establish an unequivocal truth only if we understand what its words mean.

Thankfully, other textual ontologists have taken other approaches to this question. One of the classic works in the field is David Lewis's essay "Truth in Fiction," which, after Champigny's dogmatism, deploys a refreshingly pragmatic approach to the question of truth and falsehood in fiction. For Lewis, an uncertain, un-

spoken element of the story can be considered true if it is more likely to be true than untrue in the real world—or rather in the real world such as the author's society believes it to be (that society's "belief-world," to use Lewis's term [273]). With this formulation, Lewis would seem to nimbly avoid the fruit-tree fallacy: since the society of the putative author who describes that tree very likely believes that fruit is preceded by flowers, we can assume that the tree was once in bloom. But not all questions are quite so easily settled, for there are indeterminacies in any text that cannot readily be presumed to be true or untrue in the collective mind of the author's society. Consider, to take Lewis's example, the following strange question: as he is plummeting to his death, does Sherlock Holmes have an even or an odd number of hairs on his head (270)? Since the one is no more likely in the real world than the other (or more likely to be thought true in the real world by the author's society), then in fact neither is true. And with this Lewis's model simply revives the fruit-tree fallacy in a different form, for if there is neither an even nor an odd number of hairs on Holmes's head, then his is a head utterly unlike any head in the real world, or, surely, in the belief-world of Conan Doyle's society (imagine polling a representative sample of that society, asking whether they think it more likely that a head has an even number of hairs, an odd number of hairs, or neither: how many votes would this third option garner?). Like Champigny's, then, Lewis's rule breaks itself: seeking to separate out the true from the untrue in a fictional work, he arrives at a conclusion forbidden by his own theory. I hasten to add that Lewis's discussion is an admirably logical one, displaying real good faith. As I hope is becoming clear, however, logic and good faith are not sufficient tools for dealing with the intractable questions posed by a work of fiction, particularly when a manuscript is brought into play.

This seems especially evident if we try to apply Lewis's theory

to Narcense and Saturnin's quest. Is Queneau's society more likely to believe or not to believe that a room can become invisible and un-enterable once its door has been removed (or that two more or less sentient, apparently sane people might believe such a thing)? I would suppose not, but neither do I find that a reason to discount the possible truth of this passage. Queneau's society would surely be more likely not to believe that one person can also be another, but if we take that as our criterion we must conclude that Pierre Le Grand is not actually Pierre Troc, in spite of the novel's very strong suggestion—a very strong suggestion, not an “unequivocal” statement—that they are one and the same (182). To conclude otherwise is to silence one of the novel's most striking enigmas, and so to reduce the force of the text considerably. The one is the other; the only problem is deciding what the meaning of “is” is—and this is one of *Le chiendent*'s principal themes, which is precisely why it matters that they be the same person. Queneau's novel explicitly asks its readers to believe a great many unlikely things (the existence of two-dimensional beings, for instance); given that context, how do we justify falling back on a putative public's common sense to determine the truth of less overtly stated phenomena? And finally, are we to consider true in the novel widespread beliefs of Queneau's society that have nothing to do with the novel itself? I once read somewhere that the French have greater confidence in homeopathy than Americans do; so does homeopathy work in *Le chiendent*? How can it, since there is no reference to homeopathy in the novel? And yet, in Lewis's formulation, it must. Does it *matter* that homeopathy works in this novel? If not, we are saying that what is true in the novel does not actually matter to the novel, which seems at best counterintuitive; if so, we are saying that a novel becomes essentially unreadable to anyone not entirely cognizant of the thinking of the author's society (and even that readers from that very society must reorient their thinking so as

to reflect the doxa that prevails around them). Then there is the troublesome matter of defining that word “prevails”: if 51 percent of the French people of Queneau's time believed that homeopathy works, does that mean that homeopathy works 51 percent of the time in the novel (could Ernestine have been saved if a homeopath had been called? or only if 51 homeopaths had been called?). Or is 51 percent simply not a large enough majority to decide such questions? At exactly what percentage can a belief be said to prevail? 75 percent? More?

As reasonable as Lewis's model appears, then, it leads to something uncomfortably close to incoherence when we try to apply it. Thus, somewhat more recently, Gregory Currie's *The Nature of Fiction* proposes another answer to this question, an answer I admire both for its lucidity and for its openness. Currie's theory is a particularly rich and dense one, whose foundation we can summarize as follows: to determine what is true in a work of fiction, we must determine what the teller believes to be true. This idea feels much more sensible than Lewis's, much more workable, much more useful, and it allows us to produce far more reasonable answers than Lewis's system when the text in question is not a realistic one. Thus, for Currie, the question of whether a dragon in a fairy tale can be assumed to breathe fire (even if the text does not tell us so) is an answerable one: since dragons in such stories generally do breathe fire, “it is quite reasonable . . . to infer . . . that the fictional author believes that the creature breathed fire, and so that is true in the story” (86). Currie's theory spares us the needless oddities that Champigny imposes (such as a dragon that neither does nor does not breathe fire) and offers a far greater latitude than we find in Lewis's system, where the dragon presumably could not breathe fire. It could have, of course, if Lewis had proposed that truth depends on what the author's society believes to be true in *various sorts of books* rather than in the real world; the virtue of

Currie's theory is that it implicitly makes this crucial concession. To determine what the teller believes can only mean to determine the role the teller is playing for an audience, which surely expects different phenomena from different narrative roles (the expected stance of a teller of fairy tales is not the same as that of a realist novelist, and the range of possible truths must be different in those two cases). Currie's theory thus allows for the existence of non-realist fiction as well as realist, and for the effect of connotation as well as of denotation, and this is a most welcome thing.

As Currie acknowledges, the difficulty is determining what the fictional author believes. This, he says, must simply be decided by the reader, using a guideline that may well surprise us: "What is relevant to working this out is a knowledge of what people in that community tended to believe" (79). We are thus back in Lewis's flatly literal universe, in which communal beliefs can determine real fictional truths. Currie applies this idea as follows: in the Sherlock Holmes stories, "the planet Pluto does not exist undiscovered. It does not exist at all, since no one believed in it at the time" (79). And so we find ourselves, once again, before a sadly familiar fruit tree. To say that the planet Pluto did not exist is not to keep some irrelevant bit of information out of the world of the Holmes stories; on the contrary, it is to *add* something to that world. It is to place into those stories an absence (the absence of Pluto) that was not there before. And unless we believe that the teller of this story believes that there is something (the existence of Pluto) that his public doesn't know they don't know, to place that absence into the story is to disobey the very rules of Currie's theory. No matter which way I turn, there is no way out of this trap, for whatever I say about the planet Pluto in the Holmes stories (for instance), I am changing the nature of the planet Pluto there, and hence, perhaps, the story itself. If I claim that Pluto does exist in those stories, I add to the story by (as Currie says) creating something

that no one at the time believed to exist. If I claim that it does not exist, I add to the story by creating an absent presence within it (I create in the story an object that does not exist, where before there was no object, which is not the same thing). If I claim that it neither exists nor does not exist, I add to the story by creating within it an extraordinary impossibility that turns the text into a work of mysticism or science fiction. The best solution, perhaps, would be to say that Pluto exists in the Holmes stories, but that no one knows it—except that here too I am adding to the story, creating an ignorance on the characters' and narrator's part that was not there before. This is, I think, a profoundly important lesson: to define where truth in a story ends is inevitably to posit a truth (an event, a state of things) that stands outside the bounds one has just established.

This notwithstanding, if we now try to apply Currie's thinking to the manuscript passage before us, we will find that he does offer a kind of flexibility that Lewis and Champigny do not—that his theory, refreshingly, does not dismiss outright the potential reality of these events. The teller of this story does indeed seem like the sort of person who might believe that rooms can go missing (or that sane people can believe that rooms can go missing) and that the Parisian region can be inhabited by a family with names straight out of Egyptian mythology (he does explicitly believe in the existence of Sophie Isis, for instance). We can assume that he believes such things because he believes all sorts of outlandish things: that there are two-dimensional entities who can become three-dimensional people, that it is possible, with a little willpower, to erase all that has happened in one's life, and so on. Very well, then: Currie's theory allows us to accept the events of the manuscript passage as true. Except, perhaps, that it doesn't, for, as he writes later on, "it is a fallacy to suppose, if anyone does, that something can be true in a fiction just because the author intends

it to be." Thus, if Conan Doyle himself thought of Holmes as an alien and simply assumed that his readers would see him the same way, it still wouldn't be true: "even if Doyle's private correspondence revealed this intention, we would go wrong in concluding that it was true in the story that Holmes is an alien being," for "a knowledge of the text together with a knowledge of what was commonly believed in the author's community would not enable someone playing our make-believe game to infer that the fictional author believed this" (109). Currie's example would seem to apply to our passage as well: even if Queneau himself believed (for purposes of this novel) in this possibility, nothing in the text or in our understanding of Queneau's community would allow us to suppose that the *narrator* of *Le chiendent* believes specifically in missing rooms and so on. We can suppose that he believes in outlandish things, but no doubt this is not enough: we cannot extrapolate one specific belief from the general kinds of beliefs that the fictional author holds. The fictional author of the Holmes stories manifestly believes that disguises really can conceal an identity, just as he believes there is something that sets Holmes apart from the common run of men, but we cannot assume on that basis that he believes Holmes is an alien. And this is true no matter what Conan Doyle thinks, for there is a difference between the real author, as revealed in private correspondence, and the fictional author as revealed in the text itself. It's hard to disagree, but then we must wonder if the voice speaking in the manuscript passage is that of the fictional author or that of the real one, if they are in fact the same voice.

Currie implies that they are not, but in a rather indirect way, as, like so many others, he never raises the issue of manuscripts and definitive texts. His thinking essentially follows a line we have already seen in Eco's *The Limits of Interpretation*: if two texts give different reports of a given character's actions, then those two

characters are not the same character. They may have certain characteristics in common, but they cannot be the same, for, Currie writes, a character "is a person about whom the fictional author of *this text* is writing" (179; emphasis in original). It would seem logical to extend this theory to the fictional authors of the published book and of the manuscript passage we've just been looking at: if the fictional author of the manuscript passage is not writing about the same Narcense as the one we find in the novel, then presumably he cannot be the same as the fictional author of *Le chiendent* (the fictional author of the manuscript is not the fictional author "of this text"). But here, once again, Currie's thinking turns troublesome. He tells us that even two identical texts written by two different authors would produce two different characters (179); if this is true of two different authors (which I take to mean real authors, who produce fictional authors in the act of storytelling), then in theory it should be true of two texts by the same author as well. But no. For Currie, the fictional author of one Sherlock Holmes story is the same as the fictional author of another: "I think we may treat these stories as episodes in one big story, the whole of which defines the Holmes character. Each separate episode contains what is merely a partial specification of the character" (176-77). My first reaction to that statement is to note that the fictional authors are the same solely because we are dealing in each case with the same real author (the distinction between real and fictional, vital to one aspect of Currie's thought, here proves far blurrier than it first appears). But my second reaction is perhaps more meaningful: why should we not see these manuscript passages too as "episodes in one big story," that big story including the novel itself? The difference is that the novel is published, the manuscripts not—but is publication really to be considered the necessary condition of reality? If so, then we come back to the questions I posed earlier concerning the reality of the events of manuscript drafts as they

are being written, and we must once again note the profound difficulty of considering that the author can only write untrue statements as he or she is writing the book. If not, then we are adopting the kind of thinking we find in McGann's *The Textual Condition*, but we must note that McGann and others of his theoretical persuasion never touch the question of the reality of the events of the manuscript—only the reality of the manuscript as an element in the *identity* of the novel. Would they be willing to see the manuscript in any other way? For McGann, is every incident described in the manuscript *true* in the novel as opposed to simply an element of the book's history? Alas, he never says.

My point throughout this discussion has been that any attempt to exclude a manuscript passage such as this from our understanding of the text, however defensible it may intuitively seem, seems to trip itself up every time. Again, I do not seek to prove that these events "really happen" in the book, but only to note the apparent impossibility of proving otherwise. And there is one more aspect of this question that we must consider here: not the theoretical validity of arguments supporting or denying the truth of this passage, but rather the passage's effect on the reader, and the implications of believing it to be true or false.

My own naive response on finding the passage on the placement of the door was to assume that it was true, that it happened in the text, and that it allowed me to understand the text more fully than I did before. A very agreeable feeling, but it has its consequences: if reading this passage has allowed me to understand the novel better, then surely, on this score at least, those who have not read it understand the novel less well than I. If we are to use manuscripts as a way of better understanding the text, then, we are saying that the text itself is not enough (not enough for a complete factual understanding of the text itself, that is) and thus that the text is not complete—not really, in a sense, itself. As

we've seen, this is a difficulty of McGann's approach: if you have not read the manuscript—all the manuscripts, all the editions—then you have not really read the novel. And since this particular passage is not reproduced among the variants of the Pléiade edition of *Le chiendent*, and since this manuscript is currently available only at the Centre de documentation Raymond Queneau in Belgium, then you cannot really understand *Le chiendent* unless you have made that pilgrimage, which is to say unless you have the time and money to do so. We might answer that to have read the manuscript is not really to have understood the novel better, but only to have understood the novel differently. However platitudinous, this is a lovely idea, and one for which I feel a real ethical and theoretical affinity, but I'm not sure how strongly I believe it can actually be put into practice (by others or by me). When differently means more completely, I don't believe it can ever really mean just differently. I don't believe that separate can ever really mean equal—a question I will take up in greater detail in chapter 4 of this book.

To allow the manuscript to resolve the uncertainties of the text, ontological questions aside, is thus, shall we say, ethically untenable; what, then, if we take the opposite stance, that there is no need to read the manuscript, because what is in the manuscript is simply irrelevant, that the events there described are not in the book and therefore do not happen in the book? Here too, I find I can agree with that position in theoretical terms, but again I find it disturbing in practice, and for a very simple reason: I've read that manuscript passage, and I don't think it's that easy for a reader to banish such an experience from his or her thoughts. When I reread the relevant episode in *Le chiendent*, that manuscript passage always comes back into my mind, once again perfectly explaining what the text leaves vague. As I read *Le chiendent*, then, I know something that the novel does not want me to know, and

I can't drive that knowledge from my thoughts and my reading. And if we are to claim that the manuscript passage is false or that the events in that passage do not happen, then it's difficult to see in what way we could claim that my reading of *Le chiendent* is not now a sullied one, a faulty one. Is it now impossible for me to read *Le chiendent* correctly ever again—and for you too, now that I've told you about this passage? Could it be that the manuscript actually threatens our ability to read (and could that be why so many theorists of literature so scrupulously avoid talking about it)?

That question brings us to a very different mode of literary inquiry, for everything I've just been saying about that manuscript passage closely mirrors a central question of reader-response theory. As we've just seen, a manuscript passage can offer us, in explicit form, details that the text leaves indeterminate; but of course (no matter what Champigny seems to think), indeterminacies, ambiguities, and uncertainties lurk around every corner whenever we sit down to read, and readers regularly fill in missing details to stop up these gaps in the text. Reader-response theory, for its part, approaching the text more pragmatically than does textual ontology, thus offers another way of understanding what happens or what is true in a work of fiction, and it is time we considered what that approach might allow us to do with the insights the manuscripts offer.

FILLING IN

Although we will eventually move on to more meaningful discoveries, I'd like to begin this discussion with a revelation so slight that it really can't be called a revelation at all: according to one manuscript passage, Pierre Le Grand's brother, here named Louis (though in other drafts he is called Michel), has a beard (CDRQ cl. 42b: 56). In the novel we never see Le Grand's brother at all; he is frequently referred to, but never shown. No doubt, as we read

the published text, we formulate some vague picture of him, but (to me, at least) he remains shadowy, indistinct, a sort of generic representation of a male human being. What this tiny descriptive detail offers us is a glimpse of the person himself as he presumably would have appeared. Now assume that, since I have read the manuscript, every allusion to Le Grand's brother summons up in my mind the picture, not of a generic male human, but of a generic *bearded* male human. Do I have the right to picture him thus? The textual ontologists would no doubt answer that he does not have a beard (because the text does not say that he does) or that he neither does nor does not (because the society of Queneau's time would not consider it more likely that he does have a beard than that he does not [but is this certain, and how on earth would we go about finding out?]). But of course as readers we need not obey the strictures laid down by that theory; and since this question of a reader's role in filling in missing details is a preoccupation of reader-response theorists, we might turn to their writings in hopes of some illumination.

The question of the presence or absence of Le Grand's brother's beard (indeed, the very character of Le Grand's brother) constitutes what Roman Ingarden calls a "place of indeterminacy." There are many places of indeterminacy in any novel; in descriptive passages, for instance, depicting a given character's physical attributes, certain points are "purposely left obscure so that they will not have a distracting influence and so that the especially important features will come to the fore" (Ingarden 51). As a rule, when we encounter such an indeterminacy, we do not automatically fill in (or "concretize") the unmentioned attributes (we do not, for instance, picture Le Grand's brother with a beard); if we do, it is "partially under the suggestive influence of the text but partially, also, under the influence of a natural inclination" (52). Ingarden considers this sort of concretization essentially irrelevant,

but (or therefore) harmless. We can imagine Hamlet as short and fat or tall and thin, but none of this alters his character in any way, and so every reasonable concretization of his height and weight is "equally permissible" (54). Note that word "permissible," because, as Ingarden warns, there are indeed *wrong* ways to fill in the details of a text: certain concretizations render the text banal (as I would consider attempts to situate the action of Beckett's *Endgame* after a nuclear holocaust, for example), while others attempt to delve into a character's soul, to give him or her a psychological depth that changes his or her nature (imagine a critic diagnosing Roquentin's alienation as a mental illness). We are free to imagine Hamlet as tall and fat or short and thin only because this has no bearing on his nature; we should thus, in theory, be free to imagine Le Grand's brother with a beard.

Like others we have seen, this theory presupposes lines of demarcation that simply do not exist. To assume that a reader's image of a character's external form is irrelevant to that character's innermost nature seems naive; if we imagine Hamlet as fat, then we are only one vanishingly small step away from seeing his obesity as a symbol (or a cause?) of his inertia, and if we picture him with a lean and hungry look, we might well see that as a symbol or cause of his restless intensity. His obesity or emaciation would inevitably become meaningful in our minds. Nor can we draw a clear line between an acceptable vision of that external form and an unacceptable one: surely if I picture Hamlet as weighing nine hundred pounds, or sixty, I *must* believe that his weight somehow metaphorically expresses his nature. Nor, rather paradoxically, can we escape the claim that, since Hamlet's external form is irrelevant to his nature, the simplest way to imagine him—the way that involves no needless invention on the reader's part, and hence the most credible way—is as physically normal in every regard, making of physical normality a *truer* picture of Hamlet's body than

the other, which means that it *does* matter how we picture him physically. Finally, let us briefly wonder what could have moved Ingarden to cite such an extraordinarily ill-chosen example: the question of Hamlet's physical form comes up unavoidably each time the play is produced, and I don't believe any director would consider the choice of, say, a fat Hamlet to be irrelevant to the character's nature as enacted in that performance.

In the end, then, I object to Ingarden's formulation because I don't believe a physical attribute can be imagined without in some sense becoming real, and I don't believe it can be real without potentially signifying something ("We're not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something?" asks Hamm [Beckett 49], and of course they are, with every action, every posture, every detail of their dress). I can, for instance, quite easily make Le Grand's brother's beard mean something. Reread *Le chiendent*, and you will find references to beards to be relatively scarce, but curiously suggestive. Bébé Toutout is the only major character with facial hair (and his beard is in fact alluded to with some regularity: see, for instance, pages 190, 231, and 242). Another dons a false beard at one point: Saturnin, as a disguise for his intervention in the attempted hanging of Théo (53). Finally, there is the "big black beard" sported by Monsieur Ploute (24), a personage invented by Pierre Le Grand to conceal from Étienne the real reason for his trip to Obonne. Perhaps there are other bearded characters here, but already a pattern is clear: beards seem to be associated with duplicity, falseness, and deception (tellingly, Bébé Toutout evokes his own respect-worthy white beard solely in order to better manipulate his victim [211]). If Le Grand's brother has a beard, then that is the pattern into which we would have to place him (assuming that it *is* a pattern). Perhaps, then, we should see the brother as some sort of trickster? Nothing in the novel would allow us to make that assumption (unless the brother is merely another of Le Grand's inventions, like

Monsieur Ploute, in which case the beard would fit perfectly); but if his beard were mentioned we would have some textual justification for seeing him in precisely that way. To imagine him with a beard may well have some effect on our perception of his nature, then, despite the fact that in the real world it need not connote anything at all. Given this, how to agree with Ingarden that specific physical characteristics don't affect our view of a character enough to matter?

Little surprise, then, that Wolfgang Iser seems to take a rather dim view of such concretizations. In *The Act of Reading*, Iser cites another example put forward by Ingarden: suppose that the text tells us that a given character is an old man. Will the reader concretize him with gray hair? Ingarden finds that the reader will very likely do just that, and that, again, this concretization has no effect on his understanding of the character's nature. Iser, however, reminds us that "As a rule, the presentation of facts in literary texts is of interest only in relation to their function," and that, while the old man's advanced age is presumably relevant to the text in question, his hair color is not; thus, the reader's imagination "scarcely needs to concern itself with the color of the old man's hair (unless, of course, this is important for the function—but then the text would undoubtedly specify it)" (177). The import of the words "scarcely needs to concern itself" strikes me as rather unclear: does Iser mean that the reader *does* not picture the old man in that way, or that he *should* not? Whatever he might intend, it's difficult not to hear a small note of censure behind those words. If the reader *does* trouble him- or herself with the color of the old man's hair, he or she is thinking about something that is not "of interest"—something that's harmful *because* it's irrelevant. No doubt Eco is thinking along the same lines when he terms readers who might wish to know the name of Charles Bovary's grandfather "fussy" (*Limits* 82). The reader is thinking of the wrong

thing, wasting time, and therefore engaging in a flawed reading (as Eco puts it, "such fussy readers would not be the Model ones" [82]). Worse yet, such readers are making an illegitimate addition to the text, forgetting that anything that matters will be provided in the narration.

That said, we must be careful not to conflate Iser with Champigny: he does indeed allow for the necessity of a reader's filling in of absent details. As he writes, "unwritten aspects of apparently trivial scenes" and "unspoken dialogue" are a necessary element of any narration (*Implied Reader* 276), for "no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism" (280). Given these "omissions," "each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way . . . as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled" (280). In *The Implied Reader*, then, Iser's stance seems considerably more libertarian than it does in *The Act of Reading*—so much so, indeed, that I can't help but wonder how to reconcile these two passages. I can only think that the lines from *The Implied Reader* refer to *events*, which can be filled in (we can, to take a familiar example, fill in the blossoming of the fruit tree), whereas those from *The Act of Reading* refer to *characteristics* (gray hair). Events may be filled in, characteristics may not (and Eco's model would appear to imply the same). I'm not unwilling to agree with this, but I can't help wondering why it should be so, where that distinction comes from, and indeed what exactly the difference is. Perhaps the text tells us that a given character has crossed the street; we may thus, according to Iser's theory, fill in the act of stepping down from the curb without the narrator stating it explicitly. (Can we then fill in the image of the character in the middle of the street, which would be a characteristic of the character at that moment rather than an event?) Similarly, the text tells us that a given character is old, so why is the gray hair

not to be considered simply unstated, like the act of stepping off the curb? Because not all old men have gray hair, I suppose, but similarly, not everyone who crosses a street does so by first stepping off a curb: it is, after all, possible to collapse into the street, painfully pick oneself up, and continue on from there (speaking of Beckett). We assume that the stepping-off process went smoothly only because it usually does; but then why not assume that the old man has gray hair, since most of them do?

I hope this argument doesn't seem too pointlessly perverse. I only mean to say that Iser's formulation, like Ingarden's and so many others, relies on the existence of clear distinctions that are in no way clear; at the same time, it leaves oddly nebulous the question of what we are doing if we *do* picture that old man with gray hair, or Le Grand's brother with a beard. Are we simply wasting our mental energy on a picture that does not signify, or are we misreading, creating a picture that *does* signify (as, it seems to me, they all do) where there should be no picture at all?

In the end, though, Ingarden's and Iser's ideas of a reader's freedom to fill in details do not seem to me fundamentally different, as both fall back on the assumption that anything that really matters in the text will be stated there. Citing Aristotle's *Poetics*, Norman Holland offers us a fine foundation for this belief: the work of art "must imitate . . . a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed" ("Unity" 118). Aristotle is of course speaking of the much larger question of the work's structure, but his idea is equally visible in the way the theories we have so far been reading deal with the much more minimal question of what is true or picturable in the text: they all seek to avoid allowing the reader to *add* anything to the text, on the premise, no doubt, that to add is to disrupt the integrity of the work. Indeed, as Holland himself writes elsewhere, "literary works, even of a

very crude kind, [have] an almost unbelievable fineness of form and structure. Even in a *Saturday Evening Post* story, each episode can be shown to fit the idea that informs and shapes the story as a whole, while in a Shakespearean play a skilled critic can easily show the relevance of each individual line to the informing principle" (*Dynamics* xii). Let me restate this idea in a highly unsubtle—but not, I think, inaccurate—form: the text is by definition perfect. It says exactly what has to be said, when it has to be said; it leaves out nothing significant, it includes nothing insignificant. "[T]he slightest tinkering with the wording of a joke or a lyric radically changes its effect," writes Holland, and "all change is destructive" (*Dynamics* 144). I argued earlier on that one way of defining the text is as certain words in a certain order, and this is merely an implication of that idea: every word in a text signifies. If this is the premise, then we can only conclude that it is equally wrong to add elements to the text, because the text already expresses in ideal form whatever it has to say.

The idea of textual perfection thus requires some way of stopping endless readerly filling in; all the same, we might well wonder if that premise is entirely sound. How do we know, when we put forward the "if it mattered it would be said" idea, that what we really mean is not simply "everything that is said matters"? If it mattered that Le Grand's brother has a beard, we would be told that he has a beard, we might easily argue (Iser does just that), so clearly it doesn't matter whether he has one or not. But if we were told that he does have a beard, then suddenly this quality that doesn't matter *does* matter—because it's been told to us. Anything told to us in the text matters; but it does not logically follow that *everything* that matters is told to us. Of course, we must make a distinction between what matters "in the story" (in the imaginary world inhabited by the characters) and in the reader's mind: we can make anything that is in the text matter (it is there, waiting

for us to make it mean something), and we cannot make anything that is not in the text matter (it's not there, so there's nothing we can do with it). To that extent, it seems reasonable to argue that any change in the text is a destructive change; but this is simply to argue that the text is what it is, as they say, and that it's made up of a finite amount of material on which we might practice our readerly skills. In other words, what we mean when we say that the text is perfect is really that the reader *makes* the text perfect—and would do so no matter what was actually in the text. I can provide an example: in *Le chiendent* we read that Le Grand himself is balding, despite his relative youth (43). Does this matter? Now that I have brought it to your attention, no doubt you have already found reasons why it does; but if that aspect of Le Grand's physique were not in the book, would your image of Pierre Le Grand really be so different? Imagine *Le chiendent* with this description never having been a part of it. Would there really be anything missing?

Needless to say, reader-response theory does not deny the reader the right to fill in material not explicitly stated in the text; the mechanics of that act are in fact one of reader-response's primary preoccupations. The difficulty is that, once again, attempts at describing—and particularly at delimiting—that act seem to display the same weaknesses we have already found elsewhere: in one way or another, they simply don't *work* in actual practice, and particularly in the context of the presence of the manuscript.

In order to discuss those weaknesses more fully, let us now turn to another revelation from the manuscripts of *Le chiendent*. One of the mysterious events of the book's early pages, already alluded to here, is the killing of Étienne Marcel's cat; his outrage at this act of cruelty is one impetus for his accession to three-dimensional reality. The novel itself tells us fairly little about this event. At dinner, Alberte abruptly informs Étienne that "one of the neighbors has killed the cat. Who, no idea" (9). The book reveals nothing

more about this crime, but the manuscripts offer an explanation that strikes me as entirely convincing. In what must have been an early draft of their conversation in the train to Obonne (see 24–25), Étienne tells Pierre of the half-built house he lives in, confiding that "it's given us a bad reputation around the neighborhood. I have very bad neighbors. I think they're shocked by my house. So, for instance, one of them killed my cat the other day." Pierre naturally asks why, and Étienne goes on: "Just because. There's a brute I've got my eye on. . . . You see, when people get their own little house they turn vicious. You have to wonder why. Death seems to them the only suitable punishment for anyone who tramples on their [illegible]" (CDRQ cl. 42b: 52). Another draft of Alberte's disclosure offers a similar but different motivation: "Then, point blank, she informs him that one of the neighbors has killed the cat, because it was chasing after their chickens" (CDRQ cl. 42b: 70–71).

Both revelations seem perfectly plausible in the context of this novel's story, and either could have been inferred by the reader. We know from the novel that Étienne's neighbors pride themselves on their gardens, and we know that at least one neighbor keeps chickens (see, for instance, pages 55, 66, and 188). To be sure, the novel mentions no neighborly animosity toward Étienne's family, but neither does it suggest any particular friendliness (apart from Mme Pigeonnier's dalliance with Théo). In any case, it seems likely that, on reading of the cat's death in the novel, the reader will briefly wonder what could have motivated this act, and will come up with some sort of answer, which must, I think, fall into one of two categories: either the cat was indeed killed by a neighbor for some reason, or else it was a perfectly gratuitous act, committed at random, signifying nothing.

Eco's *The Role of the Reader* offers a good account of the process by which a conclusion of this sort is arrived at. We regularly

infer actions not explicitly stated in the text, Eco tells us, by visualizing them in the context of conventional situations that he calls "frames"; thus, if we see a character embroiled in an argument with his wife suddenly advance toward her with his hand raised, we correctly assume that he has raised his hand with the intention of hitting her (and not, for instance, of asking permission to speak). We assume this, he tells us, by "resorting to the conventional frame 'violent altercation'" (20). Understanding the nature of the scene taking place before us, we naturally interpret specific acts within that context, and hence their motivation. We can easily apply Eco's idea to the assassination of Étienne's cat: we learn in the novel that a neighbor has killed it, and so, relying on the frame "hateful neighbors," we assume that some conflict must have motivated this crime. But we might just as well rely on the frame "random killing," which is, after all, *also* an event with which we are all depressingly familiar, and so assume that the crime sprang from no conflict and had no motivation. This coexistence of two possible frames certainly does not constitute a weakness in the theory; on the contrary, the reader's uncertainty concerning the death of the cat is an essential part of the experience of the novel, and Eco's model demonstrates the nature of that uncertainty in a particularly helpful way. But how exactly are we to know that by relying on one of these two frames we are not becoming the very sort of "fussy" readers he dismisses in *The Limits of Interpretation*? Think back to the question of the name of Charles Bovary's grandfather, a question that Eco considers perfectly pointless, because the world of a novel is a small one, limited by the boundaries of the narration itself. What is the difference, I wonder, between wondering about that name and wondering who killed the cat? Presumably there is some point at which such considerations cease to be useful readerly activity and shade into fussiness; what we cannot know from Eco's theory is where that point lies. After all,

it seems entirely possible that on first encountering the character Charles Bovary, we will mentally invoke the frame "ancestry" (is that not a frame? and if not, why not?), and that having invoked it we will go on to invoke the frame "naming," whereupon we will quite naturally—and, in Eco's own system, quite legitimately—wonder what Charles Bovary's grandfather's name might have been. And yet, Eco tells us, to wonder about (not to actively try to resolve, but simply to wonder about) that question is to fall into fussiness, and to become something other than the novel's Model Reader (which means, we can assume from Eco's tone, something other than a *good* reader). For my part, I can't see why Eco's opposition should not be reversed, why the term "fussy" should not be applied rather to the reader who feels the need to scrupulously *avoid* considerations such as those Eco condemns. In any case, his model in no way helps us to decide whether it is fussy or not fussy to wonder who killed Étienne's cat, and why. And if it can't tell us that—even as it condemns one of the two options—what are we to do with it?

Other theorists take a harder line but get no closer to clarity than Eco. Tzvetan Todorov's fine article "Reading as Construction" touches on the question of determining a character's motivation in a manner that seems directly relatable to this passage: "A reader might say to himself, 'If John killed Peter (a fact present in the story), it's because Peter slept with John's wife (a fact absent from the story).' This type of reasoning, characteristic of courtroom procedures, is not applied seriously to the novel; we assume that the author has not cheated and that he has provided (has signified) all the information we need to understand the story" (74). Todorov adheres to a certainty we have seen before (everything that matters is in the text); I cite these lines here primarily to suggest the difficulty of resolving even the simplest of questions concerning implied actions. Eco's model of the reader's interpretation

of the angry husband's raised hand seems self-evident when it is first encountered; place that model into the context of Todorov's formulation, however, and suddenly things seem far less clear. The husband's motive for raising his hand is precisely the kind of question that might interest a criminal court (so as to establish, for instance, his abusive nature), and is thus precisely the kind of question that Todorov seems to dismiss—unless we can assume, with Eco, that this motivation is indeed implied in the text, an assumption for which Todorov leaves some room by suggesting that such vital information need not necessarily be explicitly "provided," but can be simply "signified." Still, there is something troubling about the placement of that latter word between parentheses, like an afterthought added to account for the fact that not everything in a text is stated outright, a rather hasty nod to that indisputable truth, leaving the precise sense of the verb "to signify" conveniently vague. For Eco, the husband's anger is indeed signified, even if it is not "a fact present in the story" (as he writes, the reader must, in order to identify such frames, "'walk,' so to speak, *outside the text*, in order to gather intertextual support" [*Role* 32; my emphasis]). Surely Todorov would not disagree that what is "signified" is not exactly "present in the story," or at least not present in the way that information explicitly provided is. The question thus becomes "What exactly is signified in a story?"—a question to which, I am convinced, we will never have an answer.

Let us reread the passage from *Le chiendent* in which the cat's death is announced: "one of the neighbors has killed the cat. Who, no idea" (9). There are two mysteries here: who killed the cat, and why. What might the novel's words signify concerning these questions? Let us first note an odd little discrepancy in Queneau's words: the killer is "one of the neighbors," but they have "no idea" who the killer is. Presumably this means that the killer is definitely one of the neighbors, but which one we don't know. But couldn't

the text just as well be *signifying* that Alberte simply believes—or wants to believe, or pretends to believe, why not?—that the killer is a neighbor, and that on attempting to elaborate, she must confess that she has no idea, implying that she really has no way of knowing that the murderer was in fact a neighbor? And her words signify something else as well, by way of an absence: the question of the killer's identity is raised, but not that of the killer's motivation. "Why?" seems a natural enough question to pose here; indeed, in the longer manuscript passage it is the very question posed by Le Grand when Étienne tells him of the cat's death, and in the shorter one it is answered in advance by Alberte when she first breaks the news to Étienne. Its absence in the novel is thus striking, and I can see no reason why we should not conclude that it signifies. But what does it signify? Absence of curiosity on Étienne's part? Or perhaps both Alberte and Étienne already suspect the killer's motivation (knowing, perhaps, that the cat has a habit of trampling flowerbeds or slaughtering chickens), and thus have no need to say it aloud? I have no idea which of these possibilities the text signifies, or what others it might signify, or if it signifies any such thing, and this, needless to say, is my difficulty with Todorov's formulation: to assume that the text will either provide or signify everything we need to understand the story is to assume that we know what is signified and that we know whether something is signified or not—and that knowledge, as I hope to have shown here (and will show more extensively in the next chapter), is at best tenuous, and at worst illusory. And no doubt there is another flaw worth pointing out in Todorov's argument: to make a distinction between the kind of reasoning that governs courtroom procedures and the kind that governs reading is to ignore the fact that the conclusion "there is no way to determine the killer's identity or motive" could just as well be ascribed to the former as to the latter. Once again, the clear distinction that Todorov lays out in

order to found his argument blurs as soon as we begin to take it seriously.

This is in fact a remarkably frequent tendency in discussions of the reader's construction of the text. Thus, Vincent Jouve, arguing along the same lines as Eco, Todorov, and many others we've seen here, writes that the description of a greeting, for example, "can very well omit one of the three moments that compose it ('extending a hand,' 'shaking hands,' 'parting ways'); the text need only mention one of these phases for the reader to infer the other two on his own" (34). Even if we are willing to go along with this formulation so far as handshakes are concerned, it does us no good whatsoever when we come to an event such as the killing of Étienne's cat: does this mean that we can infer the motivation for that crime? There too, after all, we could conceivably claim that Queneau has simply left out two phases of a three-phase operation ("cat roams the neighborhood and, as cats will do, causes some sort of damage," "aggrieved neighbor takes umbrage," "neighbor kills cat"). No doubt Jouve would consider it a stretch to interpret the cat's death in that way, but I can find nothing in his theory to show me the location of the line between acceptable and unacceptable filling in. He does assure us that "once the author believes he has given enough information to make misunderstandings impossible, he allows the reader to fill in the missing segments by himself" (33), but I can't help wondering when exactly misunderstandings become impossible: nothing prevents me, if I'm told only that one character held out his hand toward another, from assuming that the second simply ignored this friendly gesture. I see nothing *impossible* about that kind of misunderstanding, just as I do not find it impossible, on reading only that two characters separated, to conclude that they did not shake hands before (such things happen, after all), just as I find it by no means impossible, on reading only that two characters shook hands, to conclude that they did

not afterwards separate (that too happens, with considerable frequency). It is by no means impossible for me to misunderstand the author's intended meaning in this narration of a greeting, then; similarly but contrarily, it is by no means impossible for me to conclude wrongly that no misunderstanding is possible concerning the motivation of the cat's killer.

A similar vagueness appears in Holland's *The Dynamics of Literary Response*. At one point Holland tells us that "From the lines we are hearing, we re-create the characters, the words on the page controlling and shaping the characters we create. Then, as in that writer's cliché, the characters 'take on a life of their own,' and they in turn shape and inform the words on the page" (272; emphasis in original). A few pages earlier, however, he reminds us that "most twentieth-century critics would agree" that a character has no existence outside the text (265); indeed, if we try to treat characters as if they were living beings, "we have gone beyond the sacrosanct words-on-the-page" and entered the realm of pure subjective inference (271). There is an obvious contradiction between the notion of the words on the page as sacrosanct and that of the character's ability to "shape and inform" those words; more troubling to my mind, though, is the problem of the character having no existence outside the text, for it assumes that we can know what is inside and what is outside the text. What is inside the text is what the text provides, to use Todorov's terms, and presumably what it signifies as well. But as we have seen, it is more than difficult to say just what the text signifies, just as it is difficult to state unequivocally that what the text signifies is "in" the text. Let us recall Jouve's handshake example: if the author has told us only that the two characters shake hands, we assume that they stretched out their hands beforehand, and that afterward they went on their way. Is their going on their way, for instance, "in" the text? If it is, as Jouve says, one of the "missing segments," how can it be? How

can something explicitly lacking in the text be in the text? We so readily throw around that seemingly innocuous little phrase "in the text"—but what exactly does it mean?

But if we attempt to adopt a more liberal approach to such questions, the problem of limits raises its head once again. This is the stance Walter Slatoff takes in his sharp and intriguing *With Respect to Readers*. Noting that "We are fond of insisting on the distinction between real and fictional characters, and of asserting that a fictional character has no existence or verifiable life beyond the information provided by the text" (14), he goes on to remind us that real living people are as much a construction of our minds and of language as fictional characters are, and thus that the difference between a real character and a fictional one is not that great. Thus, "we cannot really comprehend a novel or story without giving characters at least some of the attributes of living people, for much of the information we receive about them in the text itself makes it absolutely necessary to imagine that they have ongoing lives even when we aren't watching them" (15). Such filling in is, he writes, not only inevitable but necessary, "because if we did not do something of the sort, fictional characters would, in fact, be no more than verbal structures or anatomical freaks" (17). Characters "would have to be recreated each time they appeared on the scene" (15). And this filling in is in no way limited to characters; "we do something similar with respect to scenes and atmospheres. If we did not, rooms would often be houseless or lack doors or walls or ceilings; landscapes would often be without skies or horizons" (18). Slatoff's stance is certainly more generous than the others we have considered here, and more coherent, as far as it goes. Among its other virtues, it allows the reader to behave like the human being he or she is in life. The difficulty is that his formulation actually does not go very far at all. Slatoff confines himself to the filling in of rudimentary and obvious at-

tributes of the setting and its denizens, which is a most welcome corrective to the almost visible discomfort the other critics display when faced with that question, but we are left wondering just how far the reader can take this: if the room has a house and the house has a door and the door has an outside and the outside has a sky, then does that sky feature black holes, say, or asteroids hurtling inexorably toward the earth, certain eventually to destroy life as we know it? If so, then we probably have to do something with that information as we interpret the words on the page, and I'm not sure I want that obligation. Some critics prevent the text from working by attempting to place a stop on the reader's freedom to imagine, but Slatoff does the same thing by failing to set up that stop. No matter how one argues the point, it would seem, the result is obscurity or incoherence. This is no one's fault; it seems to be simply how literature works, and I find this unknowability far more exciting and more meaningful than any knowledge or certainty. In any case, one thing is clear: we have found and will find no answer to the question of who killed Étienne's cat. What would allow us to know that? Only, I regret to say, Queneau's intention.

A BRIEF NOTE ON INTENTION

More has been written about the vast and tangled subject of intention than I can possibly account for here; let me thus confine myself here to pointing out how little access to it the manuscripts offer. It seems so perfectly natural to use the manuscripts as a way into an author's intention—I've done so myself in this very chapter (see the discussion of the attempt to "place the door"). But there is no real justification for doing so; that passage gave me what looked like an unambiguous glimpse of what Queneau meant by the passage in the published book, but the two passages on the death of Étienne's cat gave me *two* possible glimpses, whose

divergence places both in doubt. Should I trust the "placing the door" passage simply because the manuscripts offer no other explanation? But Queneau could well have discarded it in his mind (and what's going on in his mind is indeed what we are after). Can I discard either explanation of the cat's murder because there are two of them? No; one could well have remained true in Queneau's mind. Can I assume that he finally decided not to attribute the cat's murder to anyone or any cause, in the end? Obviously not, for the same reason.

Indeed, as we surely all know by now, intention is remarkably difficult to grasp. This time-honored truth need hardly be demonstrated here, but the manuscripts offer a particularly striking example of that difficulty, too remarkable not to enter into our discussion. In *Le chiendent* itself, Pierre Le Grand takes Narcense for a stay at the house of his mathematician brother after Narcense comes to X... to berate Le Grand for not having helped him find work. The novel never tells us what exactly happens at Pierre's brother's house, if anything. Pierre later summarizes the events of that sojourn for Étienne, but there's precious little content to his account: they walked in the countryside, milked cows, and so on (122). It seems clear from the manuscripts that Queneau wanted to do something with this episode of a visit to Pierre's brother's house, but didn't know quite what. One version does indeed show us Narcense at the home of Pierre's brother (here called Louis Le Grand), where he apologizes for his outburst and is treated with solicitude by Pierre, Louis, and a woman unknown to Narcense, who must be Catherine (she is sometimes called Katty, sometimes Katy); apart from that, there's little to report, beyond Narcense's feelings of discomfort with the whole situation (CDRQ cl. 42b: 55–56). In another version, though, not only Narcense but also Étienne (along with his family, who remain in the background) stay at the home of Pierre's brother, who in this passage bears the name Michel. Here things take a more interesting turn, by way of

two long speeches. For one thing, there is a long monologue from Étienne (CDRQ cl. 42b: 24–26; reproduced in OC 2: 1253–55) that closely follows the lines of what appears in the published text as Saturnin's philosophical treatise (see 214–16). But what interests me is a discourse spoken by Michel Le Grand himself (CDRQcl. 42b 29–34; reproduced in OC 2: 1251–53) that anticipates almost word for word a tirade delivered by Roland Travy in Queneau's later novel *Odile* (see OC 2: 538–40). There is much to be said about all this, but I would like to limit this discussion to one simple point. In the manuscript passage, Michel tells the others that every number is the sum of at most nine cubes, but that there are only two numbers that are the sum of exactly nine cubes, and those numbers are 24 and 236. In Travy's speech in *Odile*, the two numbers are given as 23 and 239. As it happens, Travy is right, and Michel has got the two numbers wrong.

And this is where the question of intention comes in: we have no way of knowing if it was indeed Michel or Queneau himself who came up with these wrong numbers, and if we take intention seriously, this matters a great deal. If it was Michel, then we should perhaps understand him to be a slightly sloppy and absent-minded mathematician, perhaps more interested in producing a striking effect in the minds of his listeners than in actually getting things right (which makes pronouncements like "I reveal to men the mysteries concealed in the ocean of numbers" [CDRQ cl. 42b: 32; reproduced in OC 2: 1252] not only pretentious but intentionally inflated). But it could also be that Michel has evoked those two wrong numbers deliberately, which would make that same pronouncement simply ironic and mocking (perhaps Michel does have a beard after all). Either of these possible meanings could easily fit into what we know of *Le chiendent*. The first would correspond to a general atmosphere of intellectual incompetence, the characters' more or less universal inability to know (Théo can't learn his German vocabulary, Étienne's philosophical discoveries lead only

to an immovable skepticism, everyone gets the wrong impression about Taupe's door). To be sure, in the novel itself, Pierre's brother is a serious mathematician, whose work is published in the generically august-sounding journal *Acta mathematica*, but why, after all, should he not prove as feckless as everyone else in this novel? That seems entirely possible to me, if a bit disappointing, given the lofty way in which Pierre's brother is always referred to in the book. If, on the other hand, Michel is invisibly and gratuitously deceiving the others, then that corresponds to another common theme in *Le chiendent*, that of hidden deceptions (the problem of Pierre Le Grand's identity, Mme Pigeonnier's activities with Théo, and so on). In short, if the inaccuracy of these two numbers can be imputed to Michel—that is, if Queneau has intentionally put the wrong numbers in his mouth—then that might have the power to change our idea of him, in a way entirely consonant with the workings of the novel but distinctly at odds with the notion of his nature that the novel itself offers us. Of course, we may not want to let it change our impression of the character (as we've seen throughout this chapter, it is often argued that such things shouldn't change anything for us); my point is simply that if we do, then we are doing so solely on the basis of the author's intention, and there's no way to know if that intention is real.

For it could just as well be Queneau who got the numbers wrong. If he has done so deliberately, then everything I have just said about Michel still applies, but in a more underhanded way: now it's Queneau who's deceiving us, perhaps offering us the wrong numbers as a way of revealing, *without our realizing it*, our gullibility, our foolish willingness to believe what we are told, our ignorance, the weakness caused by that ignorance. And it is indisputable that throughout *Le chiendent* Queneau does indeed continually play on the reader's gullibility (we are—or at least I

am—as eager to believe in the existence of a hidden treasure behind Taupe's door as are any of the characters; we are just as easily taken in by Pierre's masquerade as Pierre Troc—or just as easily taken in by the pseudo-discovery of that false equivalence, if that's what it is). But if Queneau has simply slipped up here, then things grow considerably more troubling, because in that case, it is *Queneau's* mastery that comes into question. Needless to say, everyone makes mistakes, everyone writes things in a rough draft that they think they know but that will require further checking for the final version. All the same, Queneau's writings so commonly present him as a mathematical oracle that to see this little mistake so casually tossed off comes as something of a jolt: the omniscient creator tripped up by his own display of erudition. If we believe in intention (and I suspect we do, no matter what we may say: that's what allows us to call certain manuscript passages "rejected," after all), then there can only be something disturbing about this little lapse. Is Queneau not the master he seems to be? And what would that mean for our reading? I raise this slightly heretical point because of another odd discovery afforded by the manuscripts, one that takes the form of what seems to be a rough draft of a preface to *Le chiendent*. Whether Queneau ever actually intended to append this little text to his novel we will likely never know; either way, though, the small section that interests me (though the rest is equally funny and fascinating) remains unaffected. That part comes at the very end of this perhaps unfinished text, and concerns the novel's division into 91 parts, which he explains as follows:

my telephone number: 50-70

+ 21

91 (CDRQ cl. 42a: 39; reproduced
in OC 2: 1264-65)

This explanation of the central place given to the number 91 is as good as any other, I suppose, but I can't help wondering whatever happened to the dazzlingly complex mystico-mathematical motivation laid out in "Technique du roman" (29): 91 as both 7 times 13 (7 being the numerical representation of Queneau himself, and 13 a beneficent number) and the sum of all numbers from 1 to 13, whose own sum is 1 ($9 + 1 = 10$; $1 + 0 = 1$), a number representing the death of living beings and their return to existence, and so the irremediable perpetuity of suffering. Where is all that? Not here (presumably).

I can think of two ways to explain that motivation's absence from this aborted preface. It could be that, once again, the omission is deliberate, that Queneau had more serious reasons for the choice of the number 91 but chose not to reveal them here. Curious scenario: writing his preface, he wanted his readers to see that the novel is mathematically constructed, in a certain very limited sense, but did not want them to understand the full import of that construction. If this is true, he is casting his readers in the very role played by his characters (they think they understand, but in fact they understand at best partially, at worst wrongly). Perhaps, to be sure, he means to encourage his reader to delve further into the sense of the number 91, to observe that it is the product of 7 and 13, but I find it unlikely that the reader might then stumble onto the sense of the number 7, and virtually impossible that he or she might divine the sense of 13, or of 1 as the product of 9 plus 1 (all of which Queneau defines in an entirely subjective manner). If this is the tactic we attribute to Queneau—the tactic of incomplete, almost deceptive explanations—then it becomes more difficult to take seriously the revelations later laid out in the intention-drenched "Technique du roman," so commonly quoted as gospel by Queneau's exegetes. Why should we not assume

that there too he may be giving us a partial or even a deceptive explanation? If we are unwilling to accept that, we might at least wonder what changed between the writing of the preface and the writing of "Technique." Clearly, I suppose, he saw that there was something his readers were not seeing, and that he wanted them to see. This is an important point, but before we consider its meaning I'd like to air the second of the two explanations alluded to at the start of this paragraph.

I hesitate somewhat to evoke that second explanation, so completely does it contradict our view of Queneau, but here it is anyway: perhaps the complex meaning of the number 91 had not occurred to him as he was writing this preface (which is to say, presumably, as he was writing *Le chiendent*). Perhaps, in other words, he wrote *Le chiendent* with the idea that the 91 sections would have an essentially arbitrary motivation, and then at some later point he realized that there were more interesting, more complex, more serious things to be said about that number, things that would make "Technique" a much more meaningful piece. Perhaps, then, everything he knows about this number and its motivations in "Technique" he did not necessarily know at the time of this novel's writing. I find this hard to believe, but nothing allows me to rule it out; if it could be proven, it seems to me that it would have to change our understanding of the novel itself. Through "Technique" Queneau constructs *Le chiendent* as a novel in which intention is central, in which the absolute lucidity of the author and of his construction is the very stuff of the book. An author (of this book) less lucid than he later makes himself appear to be can only be a different author, and a book less lucidly constructed than it is later claimed to be can only be a different book, which is to say that *Le chiendent cannot be itself*.

But as I say, I don't find this latter hypothesis all that likely. Far more probable, to my mind, is the explanation that Queneau briefly

toyed with the idea of offering the reader a playfully trivial motivation for his 91 parts, thought better of it, and several years later decided to provide a (presumably) true and complete account of the novel's structure and of that structure's sense. That later decision must have stemmed from a frustration that his readers were not seeing the *entire* novel. "Technique" thus suggests that a reading that is aware of the construction is better than one that is not, a stance to which subsequent Queneau criticism wholeheartedly subscribes. Here, then, we find a particularly literal manifestation of the central problem raised by any reading of manuscripts, one intimately linked to the question of intention. If Queneau wrote and published "Technique," it can only be because he wanted his readers to see something that they were not seeing up to then, which is to say that the prior reading was a flawed one. Given this, it might be claimed that any reader of this novel who has not read "Technique" has not read the book properly, a subject to which I will return in the final chapter of this book. What most interests me at the moment is this: if it is necessary to have read "Technique" in order to fully understand *Le chiendent*, then it must be true that "Technique" is in a sense "in" the novel, even if it is not of it. And if it is possible for that text, which is not *Le chiendent*, to be in *Le chiendent*, then it is difficult to see why the same should not be true of the manuscript passages we have seen so far. Most particularly, it is difficult to see why we should see the motivation provided in "Technique" as truer than the one offered in the unfinished preface. They aren't entirely incompatible, of course—there's no reason why the preface's motivation can't be added into the complex of motivations laid out in "Technique"—but to my knowledge, no Queneau critic has ever attempted to make anything of the preface's motivation (to propose the novel as mostly arbitrary in its forms, or as refusing to take its own numerical structure entirely seriously), and indeed the "Technique" motivation simply

feels more right, more real. Why is this? Presumably because that motivation was published; it is an intention made public, and can thus enter into our reading (as one of the classic discussions of intention would have it [see Wimsatt and Beardsley 10]). Now, we might here pose a series of questions concerning what it means exactly for knowledge to be public: is an article published in a relatively obscure literary journal, as "Technique" was at the beginning, as public as an article reprinted in a book distributed by a major publisher, as "Technique" was thirteen years later? If the latter is more public, does that make it more applicable to the text? Truer? If both are equally public—if breadth of dissemination has nothing to do with the degree of publicness—then can I type up a single copy of a text and hand it to a passerby or leave it on a street corner and consider it published? And if the degree of publicness varies but does not affect the degree of applicability, does that mean that this latter tactic would suffice to make my stated intention usable? But rather than linger over those (important) questions, let us consider this: if we take the revelations of "Technique" seriously, then we believe them to be "part of" *Le chiendent*. And if we believe them to be part of *Le chiendent*, then either we believe that they became part of that novel with the publication of "Technique" (that they became true only at that moment, assuming, once again, that there is indeed "a moment" at which an article is published) or else we believe that they were true and a part of the novel even before they were published, even before they were written down—which is to say that in fact we *don't* entirely believe that all meaning comes simply from the text, even as we do believe quite entirely in the centrality of intention. And if we believe that these aspects of the novel become real only with the publication of "Technique," we believe exactly the same thing (the author's intention is inherently the right one). But it remains unclear why we should trust the one interpretation and

not the other (that of the preface) if we believe in intention, or for that matter why we should trust either one, since the existence of the two texts suggests at least the possibility of one or more deceptions on Queneau's part, at the moment of the writing of the preface, or of "Technique," or both.

The coexistence of those two texts, like the coexistence of the manuscript and "the book itself," is, if we allow its implications to penetrate our minds, a profoundly unsettling one. To be sure, books go on signifying whatever they signify whether the manuscripts exist or not, whether they differ or not from the published version; it's not my intention here to suggest that the manuscripts somehow undo the book, or shatter its boundaries. On the contrary, the book remains the book (certain words in a certain order)—that's precisely what makes the manuscripts troubling. And to be sure, the manuscripts need not be troubling, but only if we refuse to think of them in the ways I have chosen to think of them here. If we choose to see them from a genetic point of view, or as a biographical document, or a precious object, then they needn't and won't trouble us at all. To allow the manuscripts' words to *signify*, on the other hand (and in the name of what exactly would we not allow them to signify?), is to raise a host of baffling questions. Certain theories have arisen that seek to answer such questions (but never the *same* questions: it is unfortunate, but scarcely surprising, that theoretical systems such as textual ontology or reader response never consider the manuscript), but in practice, when confronted with the manuscript, such theories seem remarkably self-defeating. There is perhaps no "other book" more radically other than the manuscript, nor more fascinating; there is no "other book" that so radically challenges our conceptions of how literature works. Hence, perhaps, our reluctance to allow it to do so.

3 TRANSLATION

AND THE SAME GOES, DIFFERENTLY, for translation. The very notion of allowing a translation to affect our understanding of the original text in any serious way seems absurd on the face of it, precisely because of that phrase "the original text," which implies a relationship very like that of an original to a copy. If that's how we think of it, then the original can only be the model, and the translation can only be subservient to it, and lesser than it. At best, the translation can tell us something about the work, but nothing beyond what the work itself tells us. At worst, it can only tell us far *less* than the work does. I think this latter view is by far the more common one, and one that extends in fact to *all* translation. Something is always lost; a translator always betrays. This tenacious mistrust of translation is only natural, the eternal questioning of a translation's fidelity to the original entirely reasonable. We are, after all, dealing with a reproduction, flawed or otherwise, and who would not prefer the real thing? But this suspicion of the copy and this faith in the original have a not-entirely-obvious implication that I think worth spelling out: a kind of confidence, once again, in our notion of what the text is, a certainty that the text is in fact something. Something more or less fixed, finite, expressible in at most a very limited number of ways, and

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probably only in *one* way. (Even Stanley Fish, notwithstanding his steadfast refusal of the fixedness of the text, writes that "it is impossible to mean the same thing in two or more ways" [32]). No matter what we may claim to believe about the reader's part in the construction of the text or the textual condition or the free play of the signifier, then, we fall back into a kind of absolutism when faced with a translation (admittedly, Fish is not talking about translation here, though I don't see why his claim shouldn't apply). Translation forces us to admit a potentially uncomfortable truth: on some level, to some degree, and no matter how vigorously we deny it, we do believe in the text as certain words and not others, as something inherently right in itself and necessarily marred in any other form, as something real in a way that no reproduction can ever be (as an original, in short).

Which is odd, actually, for even as we judge a translation according to the respect it displays for a fixed set of signifiers, the translation shows us the unfixedness of those very signifiers, their fluidity, their mutability, their rugged transformability. Every time we read a translation as if we were reading the text—as we all do, either unthinkingly or because we have no other choice—we acknowledge that aspect of a work's existence. To be sure, our acknowledgment of the possibility of translation, and thus of the fluid side of the text, is always a bit grudging; we turn up our nose a little, we consider the translation somehow less real than the original, we place precious little value on a translator's work—and yet, say what we might, we still read translations and claim to have read the book.

A translation is thus, or should be, a profoundly troubling text. It denies the sacrosanctity of the words on the page (they can be replaced by other words) even as it underscores it (we never really trust in the legitimacy of those other words). Like a copy or a manuscript, a translation shows us two contradictory but inescap-

able aspects of a book's existence (closed and open, singular and multiple), but does so in a particularly unsettling way, for rather than the essentially abstract realm of the text's mode of being, or the perhaps idle question of the set of events that make it up, it questions the necessity of the novel's most intimate essential, its words. Whatever effects a translation may wreak, it wreaks them on the very substance of the text, its medium, its body, insistently teasing us, if we're willing to listen, with a most subversive question: do words matter, or don't they?

As it happens, this same question is repeatedly posed, in a variety of forms, by *Le chien-dent* itself. By its own origins, to begin with, for the fact is that this novel started out as nothing other than a translation—of something or other. In a brief, late article entitled "Errata," Queneau ascribes the book's genesis to an aborted French translation of John Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*; some thirty years earlier, in "Écrit en 1937," he had attributed it to an attempt to render Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* in a more modern, "oral" idiom. The former article was meant to correct the erroneous information given in the latter; nevertheless, it is possible not to believe too wholeheartedly in this rectification, to see the translation of Descartes as indeed the more plausible of the two sources. Descartes is unmistakably present in *Le chien-dent*, thematically (Étienne Marcel's accession to thought and thus to full existence neatly mirrors the Cartesian *cogito*), genetically (the manuscripts include a passage in which Saturnin claims to be translating the *Discours* into modern French, with examples, more of which in a moment), and programmatically (the idea of updating a classic of French literature reflects Queneau's long-standing belief in the need for an overhaul of standard French grammar and spelling). This third preoccupation was one particularly dear to Queneau's heart, defended in essay after essay from the time of *Le chien-dent* on. Spoken French has evolved since the seventeenth

century, he repeatedly argues, but written French hasn't kept up. As a result, the French people are hobbled by their own language: "I believe that a dead syntax is such a wet blanket that once we've got rid of it there will be not only a new poetry, but even a new philosophy" ("Conversation" 41). How better to cast off that suffocatingly old syntax than by translating an undisputed monument like the *Discours* into a fresh "neo-French"?

But there is a contradiction lurking here. To assume that Descartes *can* be translated into neo-French (and even in "Errata," Queneau tells us that this was once a project of his [221]) is to suggest that this new language can express thoughts first couched in the old one, but to see the old syntax as an obstacle means that there are certain thoughts it *cannot* convey. Why should the new language be capable of translating old ideas, but the old language incapable of expressing new ones? Why should translation be possible into the one language but not the other? Queneau has his own reasons for championing neo-French over standard French, of course, so let us leave that contradiction aside and concentrate on its entirely sensible premise: sometimes translation works, and sometimes it doesn't. We all know that, of course; that's why we're so concerned with the accuracy or inaccuracy of a translation. But how exactly do we tell the difference?

This would be the time to cite Saturnin's sample of his translation of Descartes, in which the original's "Good sense is the thing most widely shared in this world" (568) is rendered as "People aren't such dumbasses as you might think" (*OC* 2: 1250). It's difficult to say how seriously we should take this attempt, but if it is meant, beneath however many layers of irony, as an example of neo-French's ability to translate Descartes, then we have the right to wonder if it is a good rendering or not—and in many ways it isn't. Descartes's sentence does not contrast the actual intelligence of human beings with their apparent stupidity, as Saturnin's does:

that he has added. Furthermore, Saturnin has replaced a fairly distinctive phrase, evidently devised by the author for the occasion, with an expression widely used in France ("pas si cons qu'ils en ont l'air"): another affront to fidelity, which to my mind dictates that only a commonplace expression be translated by a commonplace expression. Nor, by its use of a phrase that Descartes would surely never have committed to print, does Saturnin's version respect the nature of Descartes's voice. Addition, simplification, distortion: hallmarks of a bad translation, and yet, to be fair, Descartes's idea (people can be expected to have some degree of sense) does come through all the same, with a certain undeniable clarity. Saturnin thus successfully communicates Descartes's general notion, and furthermore does so in a pleasingly provocative and nervy way (and many a translation, such as Beckett's rendition of Chamfort's aphorisms, has been praised on precisely those grounds). Perhaps, then, it's a good rendering after all? Rather than seek to answer that question, let us now consider a little passage that is clearly, on the surface, intended as a *bad* translation, this one culled from the pages of *Le chiendent* itself. Early in the novel, Clovis overhears Étienne and Le Grand in conversation after their first visit to Taupe's hovel, and pays particular attention to the following little snatch of dialogue:

—What value can he possibly ascribe to that door? asks Étienne.

—I doubt that it has any value at all, answers Pierre. Perhaps that senile old man has hidden some money behind it. The classic aged-miser type.

—There's something very odd about that door. Really very odd, says Étienne. (*OC* 2: 77)

A few pages further on, Clovis repeats this conversation to Mme Cloche as evidence that Taupe is a "mijonnaire":

So they were walkin by me, coon't see me, nwunovum said "It's obvious he's hiding his money behind the door," and theyuth-erwun said "He's an old miser, he's got to be really really rich" and the first one said again "No doubt about it, he keeps his money hidden behind the door." (OC 2: 81)

Here, then, is another translation of proper, standard French into a looser, more oral equivalent, and here again we have the right to wonder how good it is. As with Saturnin's reworking of Descartes, a certain *idea* of the conversation's drift comes across; to be sure, its sense has been amplified somewhat, its terms distorted, but is that not precisely what we are expected to find so delightful in Saturnin's version? "I even put in some slang and some puns to give my readers a little fun," writes Saturnin of his own rendering (OC 2: 1250): is that any less egregious than Clovis's decision to punch up the tone of this conversation a little? Is there really any notable difference between Saturnin's transformation of the original and Clovis's?

But, the answer might come back, Saturnin has only underscored an idea that is no doubt implied in the original sentence, while Clovis makes Pierre and Étienne say something they're not actually saying. He replaces "perhaps" with "it's obvious"; he adds a second allusion to the idea of money hidden behind the door. Most seriously, he turns "classic aged-miser type" into "an old miser, he's got to be really really rich." That last phrase is the linchpin of Clovis's interpretation, and the basis on which we might call his translation a bad one: rather than report Le Grand's line faithfully (rather than respect Le Grand's intention), he alters the words to suit his own tastes. But here a problem arises, for on closer inspection it begins to seem that Le Grand might be saying exactly what Clovis has him saying. What exactly is the classic image of the old miser: a poor man or a rich man? Either is pos-

sible, of course, but in both literature and the popular imagination the "classic type" does often take the form of a (perhaps secretly) *wealthy* man. Clovis's notion of Taupe's nature eventually proves erroneous, it's true, but his reading of Le Grand's words and intention isn't necessarily off the mark: for all we know, the image of a very wealthy Taupe is precisely what Le Grand is trying to convey, and precisely what his words *do* convey (even if he doesn't consciously intend them to). Perhaps, too, Saturnin's rendering of Descartes's words says exactly what those words really mean. On what grounds exactly can we say that it doesn't—that the idea Saturnin gives us isn't "in" Descartes's idea?

Reading and reflecting on these two translations, I find myself reliving a sensation familiar from my own work as a translator, a bit like free-falling into a deep, dark abyss, my certainties fluttering away as I plummet. If that image seems overwrought, consider the magnitude of the doubts involved. Translation inevitably changes the original, and I don't know if that really changes anything (I don't know, for instance, if Saturnin's added comparison of real versus apparent intelligence actually makes any difference). Does it matter when a translation is "unfaithful"? Worse yet, I'm not sure I can tell the difference between infidelity and its opposite: how exactly should I know whether "He's an old miser, he's got to be really really rich" is or is not a faithful rendering of "The classic aged-miser type"? And thus, most troublingly of all, what exactly makes me think I understand what the original is saying? How am I to determine whether Pierre's "perhaps" is really an "it's obvious"? I myself often use that former expression to imply the latter. Is that what Le Grand is doing? Nothing, absolutely nothing, allows me to say one way or another. Put those three uncertainties together, and you have a powerful undoing of the very idea of the meaning of the text, its readability, its intelligibility. In short, the act of translation (and even the reading

of translation) has a great deal to tell us about the questions I've chosen to consider here—the nature of the text, its necessity, its mutability—and much useful ignorance to bestow on us. But in order to see this, we must not read the translation as a reproduction of the original, whose differences from that original are simply flaws; rather, we have to *trust* the translation, let its differences speak. We must, for once, take translation seriously.

In that context I'd like now to turn to the late Barbara Wright's excellent translation of *Le chiendent*. Wright was among the finest French-English translators of the second half of the twentieth century; she earned a good deal of well-deserved acclaim for her renderings of modern French classics, from Jarry to Modiano, and particularly for her smart, deft, and creative translations of Queneau. She expertly tackled *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes*, *Exercices de style*, and others; most importantly for our purposes, she produced a remarkable translation of *Le chiendent*, published in 1968 under the title *The Bark Tree* and recently reissued as *Witch Grass* (unless otherwise indicated, all future citations of Queneau's book in this chapter refer to Wright's translation, and to that latter edition). But however fine a translation, it remains a translation, and thus another "other book," displaying the same friction with the book itself as we've seen in the copy and the manuscript. As always, my purpose here is to study that friction and to consider the questions it gives rise to; necessarily, the discussion that follows will concentrate on what I see as differences between Wright's text and Queneau's, but I should say from the outset that none of what follows should be read as a criticism (or even a critique) of Wright's work, and that the discrepancies I highlight are absolutely not to be seen as failings or flaws. I would be very unhappy if any reader concluded that these departures detract from Wright's rendering: my point is precisely that they don't. I evoke them here not to discuss Wright's excellent work as a translator but to allow them to

undo certain certainties that are equally present—but too easily overlooked—in a reading of the book itself.

But even if these changes do not detract from our understanding of Queneau's book, they remain changes to that book, which obliges us to pose a very simple and very complicated question:

DOES CHANGE MATTER?

One would be hard pressed, I wager, to find a single study of the practice of translation that doesn't at some point tell us it does, one that doesn't at some moment or other lament the loss that comes with an imperfect rendering. No one writing seriously about translation would agree with Norman Holland's proposition that "all change is destructive" (*Dynamics* 144), yet that idea can often be seen lurking somewhere in the background all the same. A certain lip service (an uncharitable word, but not entirely inaccurate, I think) is generally paid to the notion of a translator's freedom, but the authority of the original is forever creeping back into the discussion. Sukanta Chaudhuri, while proposing a model of translation that "regards source-text and output-text as binaries encircling one another, neither of them a static body" (35) and privileges "a trajectory of departures and innovations that redefine the 'original,' the surface-bound, the intentionist" (10), nevertheless finds in a given translation elements "without warrant in the original" or "without basis" (6) or "incongruous" (7) or "misguided" (8). Mary Ann Caws comes down "squarely on the side of the occasional long shot, slippages into the non-mimetic" (9) but also expresses a concern for preserving "what the poet . . . intended" (16); she bemoans one translation's failure to reproduce the original's repetitions (63), and finds another's change to the syntax of a Baudelaire poem "a pity" (12). For Umberto Eco, some elements of a text's meaning are "negotiable" (*Experiences* 45), and so fidelity is a sort of "game" that translators must play (39); at the same

time, translators are often “*unfortunately* obliged” to depart from the author’s vocabulary (46; my emphasis), which suggests that the stakes of that game are higher than we might think. Indeed, although “we can accept a remarkable degree of licence on the content level” in the translation of a sonnet by Baudelaire (87), any tinkering with the rhyme scheme of that sonnet constitutes a “flaw” (130 n. 8). Philip E. Lewis, discussing a translation of Derrida’s “*La mythologie blanche*,” argues neither for the free play of the (translator’s) signifier nor for any undoing of the idea of origin, but rather, forcefully, for the need to display “high fidelity” to the original (62), inevitably (or so it looks to me) championing a *literal* translation of Derrida’s words. James Wood makes liberal and uncritical use of translations in his *How Fiction Works*, but also asserts that a certain sentence by Flaubert can’t really be translated into English at all, because the sound of the words won’t come across; we should thus “pity the poor translator” asked to render that sentence (189). Few go so far as Burton Raffel, whose *The Art of Translating Prose* proposes a “predictor” (24) for good translation: the degree of equivalence between the number of words and commas in a sentence from the original and that same sentence in the translation (23). This is only a predictor, of course, though Raffel never provides an example of a translation that substantially changes the sentence structure of the original and yet remains a faithful rendering. In any case, he sees an unfaithful rendering as a highly destructive thing: “those who know *Madame Bovary* only in [a certain translation] are apt to seriously misunderstand the book,” he writes (47), for “the spirit of the original author” can never escape unharmed from the “mire” that is an inept rendering (109).

I choose these quotations more or less at random, and I freely acknowledge that in so doing I am to some extent simplifying the authors’ arguments. Their views on translation are subtler than

these snippets suggest, and yet, time and again, no matter how liberal the approach, there recurs this insistent idea that difference in translation *matters*, that it does harm to the book itself. I don’t disagree in any way, but these six (like many others) display a confidence in the possibility of sorting out what matters and what doesn’t that I simply cannot share. Mattering, to my mind, is a bewilderingly tangled matter, whose import extends beyond the craft of translation, raising as it does the question of how necessary the words of the original really are, what the text has to have in order to be itself (a question that closely parallels those we considered in the previous chapters). If we can’t decide what matters in a text, then necessarily our whole notion of what the text is begins to crumble. And a study of various divergences from the text in Wright’s translation of *Le chiendent* forces us to make precisely that disagreeable admission.

Consider, for instance, an element of the text that seems particularly difficult to write off as insignificant: the title. The title *contains* the book, defines it, expresses its center; surely a change to the title is a change to the novel (as Genette writes, our reading of *Ulysses* would not be the same if the title were not *Ulysses* [*Seuils* 375]), and—when it is a translator who changes it—more or less inevitably a loss, a stripping away of something intimately and necessarily attached to the text. That sense of loss imposes itself with particular force in the case of *Le chiendent*, for this is a title exceptionally rich in motivations. In its literal meaning, the word *chiendent* denotes a kind of tough, ugly weed (my dictionary calls it “couch grass” or “quitch grass”—or “witch grass,” as Wright notes in her translator’s preface [vii n. 1]), just the sort of vegetation one might expect to find in the vacant lots, cheap housing developments, and industrial suburbs that are the novel’s primary settings. Metaphorically, a *chiendent* is a problem, an obstacle, a vexation (as Wright says, “*Voilà le chiendent* is Hamlet’s

Ay, there's the rub" (vii n. 1)), and this meaning too refers to the novel, in which the difficulties of reason and the impossibility of knowing occupy such a central place. Nor should we ignore the fact that in its literal meaning the word *chiendent* belongs to standard French, and in its metaphorical meaning to slang: again that striking, not always peaceful cohabitation of the classical tongue and its popular, oral descendant. What's more, as Wright notes, the *chien* in *chiendent* evokes the importance of the dog in Queneau's "personal mythology" (vii n. 1), to which I might add that the *dent* (tooth) may well echo this novel's many references to bodily injury, scissors, and weapons of all sorts. In short, this is a wonderfully dense and polyvalent title, and one formidably resistant to translation.

Hence the need to come up with some alternative, which we can see in two different forms in the two titles under which Wright's translation has appeared. The earlier one, *The Bark Tree*, is nearly as rich as *Le chiendent*, combining a reference to Queneau's personal mythology (a *more complete* allusion, in fact, with echoes of both the dog and the oak), an allusion to the difficulties of knowing ("barking up the wrong tree") and a drolly absurd image (a tree whose distinguishing feature is the fact that it has bark) entirely congruent with the spirit of Queneau's text. This is a magnificent translation of Queneau's title, in other words, but—simply because it is not and cannot be identical to the original title—it necessarily reshapes the reader's conception of the text. If we find in that title an echo of Queneau's *Chêne et chien*, then we are finding the presence of a work that did not exist when Queneau wrote *Le chiendent*; if we believe that the oak/dog dyad was important to him when he was writing this work, then we are once again allowing our interpretation to be guided by that later text, which may or may not be justifiable, just as it may or may not be justifiable to allow our conception of *Le chiendent* to be shaped by our reading

of "Technique du roman." At the very least, let us say this: *The Bark Tree* is in a sense a *retrospective* title: it implies a knowledge of Queneau's work that is perhaps present only as a foretaste in Queneau's title (dogs may or may not have been an important part of Queneau's personal mythology in 1933, but in any case they didn't become a perceptible part until he wrote more works featuring dogs, and particularly until the appearance of *Chêne et chien*). But of course the original title too includes the word *chien*, and I certainly don't mean to argue that we mustn't see that word as an allusion to Queneau's totem when we read *Le chiendent*. I do mean to say, however, that we cannot really know if, when Queneau wrote this book, he did indeed choose a title containing that word because of its oblique reference to his own name—we cannot know, in other words, if that *chien* itself really matters, and thus if it matters if it is or is not translated.

Indeed, that *chien* may mean so little that it can simply be removed from the title, as was done for the recent republication of Wright's translation by New York Review Books. First suggested by Roger Shattuck in a review of Queneau's *Stories and Remarks*, this change was adopted by Edwin Frank, the director of New York Review Books, on the grounds that the new title names a real physical object, as Queneau's title does, but also that it is more atmospheric, more expressive of the novel's strangeness and darkness (personal correspondence, October 31, 2007). Clearly, Frank believes that while the "chien" does not necessarily matter, a title does, and in this change we can begin to glimpse how it might. I can't help seeing the new title as reflective of a shift in the way Queneau was perceived (or packaged) between the late 1960s and the early twenty-first century: in 1968 the emphasis might have been on the merrily anarchic side of his writing (the cover of Wright's translation of Queneau's *Le vol d'Icare*, which admittedly dates from 1973, bears the phrase "a howlingly funny

novel"), while in 2002 the accent was on the charged, unearthly side. I don't think I'm reading too much into this change: I would not be at all surprised to learn that the adventurous reader of the late sixties, in the wake of existentialism, absurdism, and the new novel, with all the high seriousness on which they depend, was (or was seen as) looking for a novel as irreverent and free-spirited as the culture and counterculture of the time, nor that a reader of the early twenty-first century might be tempted by something of a gloomier, more subterranean cast. Assuming that this is the impression conveyed by the novel's new title, we may now ask if this impression matters. It would be interesting to conduct some sort of experiment by which to discover whether a reader of *The Bark Tree* perceives the novel as more jokey, and a reader of *Witch Grass* as more spooky, and how much more in both cases. But there is very likely no way to perform such an experiment, which is in itself an interesting point: can a reader ever express precisely how a book strikes him or her? Still, we can guess. Presumably, by way of the unfamiliarity of the term "witch grass" and its allusion to sorcery, the title places our experience under the sign of the enigmatic and the uncanny, and no doubt our attempts to connect that title to the text will to some degree determine the aspects of the novel to which we pay the most heed. The word "witch" will obviously play a major role, and it would be no surprise if the reader found a resonance between that word and, for instance, the "professor of white magic" Peter Tom the Anchorite (190), or Mme Cloche's claim that she is herself the rain, the sun, ice, snow, hail, summer, spring, fall, and so on (308), an affirmation that seems to echo a witch's intimate relationship with the elements of the natural world. Such a reader might then conclude that witchery, uncanniness, and the occult (in the broad sense) play a more explicit role in the novel than would a reader of *Le chiendent* or *The Bark Tree*, and there is no way to assume that this is a faulty read-

ing: those things can well and truly be found in the text, and, as Stanley Fish would argue, simply become more visible once they are pointed to in the title. But of course Queneau's title does not really point to them, so should they be important or not? (Which is more important, what is in the text or what the title wants us to see in the text?) We can at least assume that a reader of *Witch Grass* will see the book differently from one who comes to the book under one of the other two titles. Both of the English titles alter the book, and presumably this matters; but I would make that claim more confidently if, by these standards, the original title did not do precisely the same thing.

For the original title too limits the text, or at least our experience of it, telling us what to look for, and so implicitly telling us what not to bother looking for. Thus, if replacing the image of the title with another image brings with it a certain kind of loss, it at least allows us to realize that the same loss inhabits the French title, which is, after all, a kind of translation itself: *Le chiendent*, in a sense, "translates" the being of the book to which it is appended, and is itself, necessarily, a *partial* and imperfect translation (it doesn't tell us *everything* that's in the book, nor everything we should look for or note). It seems to us necessary simply because it is the one the author has chosen. I have decided that the supernatural aspect of *Le chiendent* cannot be pointed out in the title of the translation without altering the reader's perception only because the original title does not point out that aspect (and so I assume that it should or must not be pointed out). What the French title does evoke I see as central to the understanding of the text only because the original title evokes it. The *dent* in *chiendent* tells me that images of sharpness and wounding are something to look for, and so—once again, exactly as Fish suggests—I find them. But of course there are a great many other recurring images in *Le chiendent*, to which I might also ascribe a particular importance if

they were highlighted by an allusion in the title: heads and feet, newspapers, even fish. Relatively insignificant leitmotifs, it might seem, but they would not be so if the title had alerted me to their central importance.

In other words, the original title too shapes the reader's perception and experience, and does not shape it in the only way in which it can be shaped. The relationship of the title to the text is at once perfect (the title tells us just what we need to know) and imperfect (there is more that we need to know about the text than the title tells us), and in this it differs in no way from the title produced by a translator. Here we should recall what we decided in the last chapter: the relationship of a narration to its events is at the same time necessary (this is the only way the story can be told, precisely because this is how the story is told, and any other way of telling would make a *new* narration, a new story) and aleatory (because it is possible to tell a different version of the events and still arrive at an analogous general impression). In both cases (title and narration) it is essential, I think, to give equal weight to their perfect necessity and to their utter lack of necessity, for in that absolute coexistence of opposites lies their true nature. It is just as possible to find reasons why *Le chiendent* is the only possible title as it is to find reasons why only *Witch Grass* or *The Bark Tree* is, which suggests that we really don't know whether the title matters or not. *Le chiendent* is the title only because it's the title; this in no way implies that it *has* to be the title, except of course that it does, simply because it is.

But if the novel's title can be marked by this sort of partial malleability, we might well wonder why the same is not true of its proper names. The name of a character is, after all, a sort of title for that character, no doubt motivated to some degree, and at the same time only a partial indication of its bearer's nature. It ought to follow the same rules as the title, one would think, and yet transla-

tors (myself and Wright included) typically balk at treating a name like a title, typically refuse to see it as in any way malleable. This refusal too has a certain effect on the book, for even the most banal name has connotations that are readily apparent to a reader from the same culture as the author or narrator (think, for instance, of the names Stephen and Jim, and of the different preconceptions they evoke) but not to a reader from another culture—one more aspect of the text lost in translation before the translator has even sat down to work. And invented names might prove even more resistant to cross-cultural understanding: I remember a fellow undergraduate student once remarking that to a French native speaker (as she was) the sound of the third syllable of the name Cunégonde (from *Candide*) instantly suggests empty-headedness and obtuseness, and I remember wondering why it suggested those things, and feeling ignorant and deficient as a reader because it did not bring such connotations immediately into my own mind (and years later, that feeling and that fear have not faded). My fellow student immediately understood something about that book, and I didn't: surely that matters? And then there are names that contain allusions to French historical figures almost certainly unknown to foreigners (the name Étienne Marcel, for instance, in the case of *Le chiendent*), and then, most troublesome of all, there are those with an explicit meaning in French but which would not be evident to an Anglophone reader. What on earth is a translator to do? Like virtually every translator I know of, Barbara Wright generally chooses to let proper names stand as they are, and no doubt for good reason; there would be little to gain by changing them. I would suppose that many of the translation's readers have no idea who the historical Étienne Marcel was, but at least the text tells us that there *is* a historical figure by that name, whom we could look up if we wanted to, if we thought this allusion might matter, if in fact it does matter. And of course the native French speaker may

not spot the allusion either, so nothing is really lost by leaving it as it is. The same goes for Pierre Le Grand, more or less: the non-Francophone may not immediately see the eponymy with Peter the Great, but then neither might a Francophone reader, for—to the ear at least—it seems a perfectly ordinary sort of French name. (A quick search of the Paris phone book turns up six Pierre Legrands, though admittedly no Pierre Le Grand.) In any case, even if the American reader's experience will be slightly impoverished when compared to a French counterpart, there's clearly nothing to be done, for to call this character "Peter the Great" would turn an allusion into a ham-handed insistence. Worse yet, perhaps, "Peter the Great" simply isn't a French name, while "Pierre Le Grand" is, so to rechristen him would be to strip him of a French identity that is, after all, perfectly limpid and no doubt necessary in the novel itself. The same goes for almost all the other names in the novel: Alberte, Ernestine, Dominique Belhôtel, Jérôme Pic, and so on. Whatever slight differences of connotation they present to an Anglophone and a Francophone reader, surely there's no point trying to do anything about it.

Still, there are times when the non-translation of a name creates a more palpable kind of loss. The fact that *taupe* is the French word for the reclusive creature we call a mole is surely not insignificant: the aged pauper does indeed live a more or less subterranean existence, sealed in behind his many locks and gates, reluctant to venture out into the light of day (93), leading a "hidden" life (OC 2: 161; this word is not directly translated in *Witch Grass*), as solitary as a fetus (97). Better yet, the name seems almost to confirm (deceptively) certain of the characters' speculations concerning the blue door hanging on Taupe's wall, that it conceals a tunneled-out niche in which he keeps his treasure. For all these reasons, it seems a shame that the American reader will not see its connotations, which confirm something we already know about that character,

but also suggest something that might be true (and that we learn to be false only toward the end of the novel). Yes, it would be a useful thing to rename him in the translation: Meussieu Mole. Why not, after all? The name would be no more outlandishly overt in English than it is in French, and for that matter Mole is not inconceivable as a French name in itself (I find nineteen Moles listed in the Paris phone book). Why does Wright not translate his name? For the same reason I wouldn't translate his name, and for the same reason she doesn't translate so many other names, I suspect: because Taupe *is his name*, because the original establishes that as his name too incontrovertibly (which is to say, I think, that it uses that name too frequently) to allow a good reader of the novel, even a translator, to think of him by any other.

Curiously, then, the book's title can be changed (and even changed again) with little hesitation, but not so the names of the major characters. No doubt there are exceptions to this rule, but not many, I would wager. Who among us would not blanch on seeing the names "Oliver Twist" or "Billy Pilgrim" translated in a French rendering of the novels that contain them? Those are meaningful names, like "Taupe" and others in this book, and surely they were chosen for their connotations, and surely those connotations somehow contribute to the overall sense of the novel. But the translation shows us that *Le chiendent* comes across more or less unhindered even if we don't see those connotations, even as it suggests that we wouldn't be able to read the novel quite as well if those names were other than what they are. The title too is chosen for its connotations, but titles are routinely altered in translation; are the characters' name more untouchable precisely because they belong to "people"? Does the practice of translators the world over pay tacit homage to the theoretically incorrect idea that characters exist much as real people do, and not as mere linguistic constructs? And is this necessarily wrong? Or else, to

turn that question around, are the names usually left untouched in translation because they do matter (they belong to a person), or because they don't (the reader doesn't have to understand all their connotations)?

In any case, Wright's respect for the original proper name holds even in the case of very minor characters bearing overtly fanciful, eminently translatable names, such as those cited in the newspaper of X...: *Tendre Soucoupe* (Tender Saucer), *Curieux Fontaine* (Curious Fountain), *Codicille Plusdun* (Codicil Morethanone), and so forth. The entities in question could scarcely be more evanescent; they're not even characters, really, but simply shadowy figures briefly alluded to, so no taboo would be broken if the translator were to tinker with their names, which are moreover readily rendered in English, and no doubt worth rendering. They don't involve puns or recondite allusions; they're simply words, straightforward and unmistakable to a native speaker of French. Why not make them so for the Anglophone reader?

I can think of two very good reasons for Wright's refusal to do so. First, translating these names might mean stripping the characters of their Frenchness, placing the events described in the newspaper less unambiguously *in France*. This is a fine argument against translating the names, though it's weakened somewhat by the fact that the title of the newspaper in which they appear *is* in fact translated (the *Little X... Echo* [176]). But of course, if one worries too much about preserving the French setting of a given novel, it becomes impossible to translate the thing at all—after all, if these really are French people living in France, why on earth should they be conversing in English? The second reason strikes me as more convincing, if slightly less rational (this, at least, is why I would not translate these names): they're *too literal* to come across convincingly in English. As a speaker and reader (albeit not a *native* speaker and reader) of French, I can read and understand

such names; they strike me as funny and outrageous, just as they would a French reader. But once I put them into my own language, they seem *too* outrageous, too heavy-handed, too unlikely. They're exceedingly unlikely in French, too, of course—that's precisely the point of their appearance in this novel—but somehow, even as a near-native speaker of French, I find them less irritatingly outrageous than they are in English. Translation's goal is to convey the meaning of the text, and surely these names are part of that meaning, but here to convey that meaning would be (Wright's work suggests, and I concur) to ruin the translation. Not only is it unclear to what degree it matters when a meaning is not exactly got across in the translation; it is also possible to claim that getting that meaning across too explicitly can actually *harm* the text.

And sometimes it's difficult to define the difference between getting the meaning across and failing to do so. I'm thinking of the name of a figure buried in the cemetery where Narcense's grandmother is laid to rest: Mme Pain. "Pain" is indeed what this character is named in the original; perhaps it would have been overblown and unnatural to call her Mme Bread, even if that's precisely what the name means, but there are consequences to leaving it as it is. We know that Queneau had a very good knowledge of English, and we have every reason to believe that hidden meanings are central to this novel's economy; it thus seems likely that he chose this name precisely for its discreet interlinguistic allusion to suffering. Of course, to French readers entirely ignorant of English, as to English-speaking readers entirely ignorant of French, there is no allusion at all. To French readers with some knowledge of English, on the other hand, there is: they will first see this name as an evocation of a life-giving sustenance, and only then, perhaps, of a torment. The experience of an English-speaking reader who knows a bit of French will be precisely the reverse, with a diametrically opposed poetic effect: not suffering

behind life, but life behind suffering. Except, of course, that an Anglophone reader may on encountering this word assume that it has already been translated (that the original has *Mme Douleur* or something of that sort), and so fail to glimpse the idea of bread at all. There are thus four ways of reading that name, only one of which corresponds to the presumably "right" reading (pain behind bread), and there is no way that the translation could have allowed its reader to perform that particular reading. The only "right" reading is the one performed by a French reader with some knowledge of English reading the French text. Translated or not in the English rendering, the name cannot reproduce it. (Even an English-speaking reader who knows French will first, however briefly, more or less unconsciously, read this name as an English word, I think.) Getting the meaning of this name across is thus equally impossible if one tries to do so and if one does not. If we assume that meaning matters, then we can only be dismayed by the manner in which the very meaning of this name prevents its meaning from being expressed, for it seems to be whispering to us that to some degree meaning cannot be conveyed—not because the meaning is resistant to translation, but because it's not resistant enough. If meaning matters, how can translation be possible?

This dilemma is restated with particular clarity by the imaginary being the original calls "Meussieu Frites." This is the name that Étienne Marcel briefly imagines when he first notices the sign ("FRIES") on Dominique Belhôtel's modest eatery; on glimpsing this sign, the original tells us, Étienne briefly wonders "if FRIES isn't somebody's name: Meussieu Fries. That idea makes him smile" (OC 2: 19). In *Witch Grass* we see Étienne wondering "whether CHIPS isn't someone's name: Mr Chips. (Good-bye.) But he doesn't think it's very likely, and smiles" (26). Here Wright has made a palpable change to Queneau's text, and she could not have done otherwise. Alas (I suppose), *chips* is the only word that

would do here, given Wright's nationality and that of her original publishers, and alas, one cannot say Mr Chips (notice that she does not write *Meussieu* Chips, more or less breaking one of the fundamental rules of Queneau's book, where *monsieur* is always written *meussieu*: do we notice? does it matter?) without summoning up images of the book and movie of that name. Wright thus found herself in an impossible position, for there was no way to render this passage *correctly* without creating an allusion that is not there in the original text. Faced with the impossibility of avoiding this allusion, she gave in to it, and shrewdly chose to underscore it with her added "Good-bye." But here too, there are consequences. The mere absurdity of the name "Meussieu Frites" becomes a different kind of humor (less childlike, more bantering), and with it Étienne's very nature is transformed (this sort of referential humor—indeed, simply this sort of reference to a world beyond his own small existence—is out of character for Étienne, so the fact that he makes this little joke forces us to attribute to him a character different from his character in the original). But again, Wright could not have done otherwise: to a British person "Frites" means "Chips," and as soon as the customary title is placed before that proper name, the allusion can't be avoided. For that matter, I wonder how many British readers of Queneau's text in French have automatically made that same connection in their minds as they read, and how many other such associations, cultural or personal, necessarily pop up unbidden in our reading every day—and, no matter how I hate to say it, if we assume that the meaning of the text matters, then it is at least possible to see this as a failing in our reading. And if we do, then it is perhaps reading itself, and not only translation, that is impossible.

Impossible, in the strictest sense, because that British reader would theoretically be, however briefly, *absent* from the text (as is every reader on encountering a typographical error, I said

earlier). But really, who can possibly expect a reader never to fall into these momentary departures from the words on the page? Isn't absence simply an unavoidable part of reading? It would seem absurdly stiff-necked to argue the opposite, and yet more often than not Wright's translation suggests a recognition of that threat of readerly absence, and a desire to forestall it. I'm thinking particularly of two cultural references that would make perfect sense to Queneau's French reader but that might distract or confuse an American. In the first of these, the "lampe Mazda" to which the original refers (*OC* 2: 18) becomes simply a "light bulb" (24); in the second, "l'eau de javel La Croix" (*OC* 2: 139) is rendered as a "well-known brand of bleach" (174). In both cases, Wright seeks to protect the reader's experience, on the theory, no doubt, that the reader's failure to understand, however brief, is harmful to the experience of the book, and something to be guarded against. Her changes express a clear (but perhaps quixotic) ideal of any translation: that the reader *should* be able to understand everything he or she encounters in the text, and that the text can be altered, discreetly, to make that smooth apprehension possible.

But do these changes protect the reader's experience? That is, which is more important: these specific allusions, or the reader's ability to proceed through the text's pages without encountering unknowns like the brand names "Mazda" and "La Croix"? Eco tells us that "the translator must decide what the fundamental content conveyed by a given text is" and that "In order to preserve a 'deep' story, the translator is sometimes entitled to change the 'surface' one" (*Experiences* 31). The translator must thus decide what matters. I don't disagree, but—in my own experience at least, and I would suspect in others'—this is far less straightforward a process than Eco makes it sound. Are those brand names "deep" or "surface"? At least one careful reader of Queneau sees the "lampe Mazda" as an allusion to the billboard cited in Breton's *Nadja*

(*OC* 2: 1469 n. 12); if this is true, then to remove it from the text is to remove something meaningful—and, thanks to the availability of an English translation of *Nadja*, something accessible to the American reader, who is not necessarily any less likely to have encountered that Mazda lightbulb than a French reader. The difficulty is knowing whether this is indeed an allusion or not. On the one hand, the Mazda brand of lightbulbs was in widespread use at the time of this novel, and it would be distressing to think that no one could refer to it in 1933 without thereby making an allusion to *Nadja*; on the other, given that this mention comes in the course of a scene in which Narcense is expressing what does seem a typically surrealist appreciation of the marvelous, everyday beauty of Hippolyte's bar, we may find it difficult not to hear an echo of Breton's book. It may or may not be an allusion, then, and our understanding of the allusion may or may not matter; at the same time, it may be there simply for the sake of realism. In either case, it's there for a reason, and what Wright shows us is that this reason (or complex of reasons) is potentially immaterial and dispensable. This is precisely the sort of decision Eco is talking about, but if I were translating this passage I would call the choice of using or not using the brand name "Mazda" less a decision than a very uncertain, somewhat desperate stab in the dark. It's simply not that easy to tell surface from depth, to separate what matters from what doesn't.

That bottle of La Croix bleach shows this even more clearly. To this day, La Croix is the most prominent brand of bleach on French supermarket shelves. A French reader will recognize it instantly; an Anglo-American reader will not. The latter reader would simply have to assume "La Croix is a brand of bleach" (a real one? one invented by Queneau?—no way of knowing) and then continue from there, which is entirely possible, with no sense of loss. But perhaps something *is* lost in Wright's elision of that

name. Early in the novel, Étienne shares a train compartment with a passenger reading the newspaper *La croix* (in Wright's translation, "the *Cross*" [10]). Echoes such as this play an important role in Queneau's narration, so we might lament this particular echo's disappearance in *Witch Grass*, if only we could be sure that it really is an echo. *La croix* is a real newspaper, just as it is a real brand of bleach; could Queneau not have cited these two names solely for the sake of verisimilitude, just as he cites the names of real streets in Paris or, perhaps, that of the Mazda lightbulb? But the perfect rhyme of the two names might well seem too overt to be accidental, and are such rhymes not central to Queneau's aesthetic, in this novel even more than in his others (see "Conversation" 42)? Indeed, but how to know that *this particular* coincidence is a manifestation of that stance? (A reader can decide such things for him- or herself, but a translator is forced to decide them *for others*, so knowing matters.)

Similarly, we can assume (having read "Technique du roman") that it matters that Narcense lives on the seventh floor of his apartment building, and so find it only right that Wright translates the novel's "septième [étage]" (OC 2: 83) as "seventh [floor]" (106) (even if, in absolute terms, it should be "eighth"). But Queneau tells us that the number 1 is *also* of great importance here: it is "at once the number of the death of beings and that of their return to existence" ("Technique" 29), and unfortunately the "premier étage" of Étienne's villa (OC 2: 28) can only be rendered as its "second floor" (WG 37). Unfortunately, I say, because Queneau's stated sense of that number rhymes brilliantly with that "premier étage": the fact that the upper level of Étienne's house has been left unfinished suggests that the building is "either half built or being demolished" (WG 18), and indeed at the end it will finally acquire a second floor (302) before losing it again in the novel's last lines ("a suburban half-house" [311]) as the novel's events are

wiped away and as everything starts anew. The "premier étage" thus seems perfectly consonant with the sense Queneau attributes to the number 1; given this, is it not wrong to strip that floor of its "one"-ness, just as wrong as it would be to strip Narcense's floor of its "seven"-ness? Except that once again Wright really has no choice: she *can't* call it the first floor, no matter how much she might wish she could. Now perhaps this matters; at the same time, I must confess that this possible meaning of "premier" had never occurred to me before I sat down to write these pages. Perhaps, then, it doesn't matter. But even if this *is* a rhyme, how seriously is the novel damaged if this and other rhymes are muted? Or, to put it another way, what does the novel gain from this rhyme, or from the allusion to the "lampe Mazda"? It's richer, I suppose, more *itself*, since rhymes and allusions are so much a part of it. So we might answer, but clearly the novel can in some sense exist (can be read and understood) without them, and so once again we must wonder just how important it is that the text be itself.

Curiously, many of the differences between the text and the translation suggest that the novel doesn't have to be entirely itself at all. In the last chapter we saw the widespread belief that everything that needs to be known will be provided (or signified) in the text, from which it is natural to infer that everything in the text matters. It would be nice to feel that this is unambiguously true, but sometimes I wonder. *Witch Grass* shows us a "player piano" in Hippolyte's café (19), where Queneau's original refers rather to a "phono mécanique" (OC 2: 14), which must be something more like a record player or jukebox. Almost certainly, Wright misread "phono" as "piano"—a minuscule mistake, but one that changes the picture of Hippolyte's bar that I see when I read this passage. With a player piano rather than a record player, it's a physically different place, for one thing—the objects in the room aren't the same—and it's also, potentially, *connotatively* different, though I'm

not entirely sure in what way. What exactly would be the connotative force of the presence of a player piano in a very modest suburban bar in the early 1930s? Is a player piano a more luxurious object than a record player, evidence of Hippolyte's ambition to improve his rudimentary café? Or is it rather a sadly old-fashioned sort of device, and consequently evidence of Hippolyte's *lack* of ambition, and perhaps of a period of prosperity enjoyed by this bar and its society in some happy past (the *belle époque*, for instance), now long gone? These are idle questions in the context of *Le chiendent*, of course, since there is no player piano in sight, but they're worth posing, first because they suggest the uncertainty of any interpretation of Wright's player piano's meaning, and second because they force us to wonder if indeed Queneau's phonograph truly means something. When we read the original, we see a record player and (I believe) assume it simply to be an element of a typical café's decor (as in Sartre's *La nausée*, for instance); but having seen the possibility that this record player might be replaced by a different object—whose connotations would be different, and hence real—we must now rethink our understanding of the record player itself. Does it too have connotations, beyond its mere presence? Is there a "deep story" behind it? Again, I think, there would be no way of answering that question.

But nothing in the translation poses the question of the necessity of the text's elements more forcefully than its missing sentences. I believe an entire book could easily be written on the oddly insistent place of the missing sentence in translation. Such lapses are astonishingly common, and, I myself have found, painfully easy to commit. There's nothing mysterious about the physical process by which a sentence is dropped in the creation of the translation's first draft: as the translator's eyes shift back and forth from the original to the text in progress, it's distressingly simple to look back just a bit further along than where one left off, and to continue blithely

on from there. Stranger, to my mind, is the great difficulty of spotting such omissions as one is rereading and revising one's work, a difficulty even more insurmountable for an editor or reader who does not know the original text (though again, knowledge of the original text is no guarantee against such omissions).

I've found four such gaps in *Witch Grass*, which we can consider all together. The passages reproduced below cite the lines in Wright's translation immediately before and after the gap, with my translation of the missing sentence supplied between brackets. The first comes as Étienne is attempting to leave the *friterie* where he has been recognized as the victim of the minor accident witnessed by Mme Cloche before the Gare du Nord:

Étienne suddenly gets up.

["How much do I owe you for all this?"]

They look at him in stupefaction. (36)

The second can be found in the conversation of the guests at Ernestine's wedding dinner after she has suddenly been struck by a fatal illness:

"She's forgotten what the doctor said."

["Isn't it a shame," someone says, "to die at that age."]

"Isn't it a shame to die at any age," says someone else. (212)

The third passage describes Taupe's terror at the behavior of the so-called abbé Rounère, who has come to demand some part of Taupe's putative fortune for the construction of a new church:

Terribly afraid for himself. [It was even beginning to become a bit too late to flee.] The curé was standing threateningly against the door. (243)

And the fourth shows us the crowds gathered around a troop train soon to leave Paris for the front lines of the Gallo-Etruscan war:

And thus everyone is patriotically employed, according to his ability. [Everyone is feeling heroic.] Of course some women are crying, but those are the ones that aren't very brave. (283)

Looking at these four passages, it's difficult not to arrive at the conclusion that the missing sentences are indeed (to varying degrees, perhaps) essentially unnecessary. Someone who abruptly stands up in mid-conversation with a restaurant's owners might reasonably be interpreted as signaling his intention to leave, which of course implies the question "How much do I owe you?" (particularly because Étienne has already tried to leave, asking essentially the same question, a few paragraphs before [34]), and this suddenness may well be expected to surprise his interlocutors. In the case of Taupe's run-in with abbé Rounère, the sentence after the gap makes abundantly clear the fact stated in the missing sentence. In the final passage, the sentence *before* the gap implies the sentiment that the missing sentence makes overt. Only in the second quotation does the passage make appreciably more sense if the missing sentence is restored; and even there, it's certainly not inconceivable that someone should say "isn't it a shame to die at any age" without first having heard someone say "isn't it a shame to die at that age" (particularly because, once again, someone has asked that very question just a few moments before, five lines above the missing sentence's spot [212], so that the final line of the quoted passage could well be a response to that earlier utterance).

But am I really prepared to call these sentences unnecessary? The translation leaves me little choice, for it strikes them from the text with, manifestly, little harm done: the translator, her editors, and I myself, among others, read this translation without notic-

ing anything missing. They add nothing, change nothing; clearly, then, certain elements of the novel do not have to be present in order for the novel to be itself. The ineffectuality of their absence recalls nothing so much as the sort of filling in that we discussed in the last chapter, the notion that not every phase of a handshake has to be described, for instance, as we can easily flesh out the act from the partial information we're given. But there's a funny paradox in this, for even as the theory of reader response and the practice of the reading of this translation show us the superfluity of these sentences, Queneau nevertheless thought it necessary to include them. Reader response displays considerable confidence in its assertion that the reader is capable of filling in relevant details, but only on the basis of details that are in fact left out of the text by the author. Here, on the other hand, we have the deletion of four sentences that the author did indeed include in the text, and with that knowledge it becomes more difficult to see them as simply unnecessary. It's very easy to speak of what has to be and what doesn't have to be in the text when you're defending the text as it's written; when it is a translator who has left out the sentences, the result is something marred, imperfect (the sentences do have to be there, because they're there in the original) even as the text works perfectly well without them, in accordance with the rule of readerly filling in. How, then, to define whether these sentences have to be there or not, matter or not? They are, after all, in the original novel, so of course they should be there in the translation, and if they should be there in the translation, then they have to be there in the original. The circle is more than vicious, it's hopeless. Those sentences are necessary (in the translation) because they're in the novel, but demonstrably, it's not because they're in the novel that they're necessary (in the novel). Except that, because they *are* in the novel, they're necessary.

I'm not trying to be puckish here; I can simply find no other way

to speak of the necessity of these sentences—and of many other elements of the text—then to assert, impossibly, the obvious fact that they are as necessary as they are unnecessary. And this is, I think, a most important truth, undercutting as it does every theory that believes wholeheartedly in the words on the page and every theory that doesn't, every system that believes it can say what must be in the text and every system that believes the opposite, every absolutism and every relativism. Everything matters in a book, we all know that (and we saw that very idea stated in more sophisticated terms in the last chapter), and yet in translation elements of the text can so easily be—are so consistently—dropped or changed or contradicted with no apparent effect that it's possible to wonder why exactly we think we know that. Somewhere there is a line to be drawn between what matters and what doesn't, but I cannot imagine where one might begin to go looking for it. Or, to take this uncertainty a step further, somewhere there is a difference between wrong and right—but what is it?

WRONG AND RIGHT

I suspect that, however we might like to deny it, behind every evaluation of a translation's worth lies that crude but nonetheless powerful distinction of right and wrong. If a translation fails to get a given idea across; it is in some sense wrong; if it succeeds, it is right. We don't like using such authoritarian terms, but they're what we all mean, I think, and we're not entirely wrong to do so: a musician might speak unabashedly of playing a wrong note in a performance, and a translator's task isn't so different from a musician's (both shift signs from one signifying system to another, for the benefit of those who can't grasp them in their original form). If a musician isn't afraid of the word "wrong," why should a translator be? There is one crucial difference, though: where a pianist's note can be unambiguously wrong, a translation's di-

vergence can display its own kind of rightness. A D-sharp in the score must bring about a D-sharp on the keyboard, but a word in French can be rendered in an indeterminate number of ways in English, and the line between the right and wrong translation is often irritatingly unlocatable. This indistinctness makes life hard for a translator, but I believe it should make life hard for readers as well, for we might wonder how honestly we can claim to understand a text if we don't entirely know what is and what is not a translation of the original wording. Disturbingly, what is not has a way of becoming what is if we give it just a little thought.

We can see this most overtly in the problem of wordplay, for—except in the very few cases where the same pun can be made in "the same words" in two languages—wordplay offers the translator only a choice between two wrong translations. Either we can translate the sense of the words and lose the pun, or we can find another parallel pun and lose the sense of the words. Something will be lost either way, and that may be a particularly grievous loss in the case of *Le chiendent*, of which a central idea is the fraught relationship between reality and its expression in language, a relationship whose slipperiness is demonstrated most effectively by the unreliable, underhanded nature of the pun. Wordplay is *important* in this novel, then, and wordplay is also, inevitably, at some level, untranslatable. Now, if we assume that the book will provide or signify everything necessary for its own understanding, then it seems dangerous to allow potentially significant bits of text to go missing; wordplay is thus essentially a sign of this *novel's* untranslatability, or even the impossibility of translation *tout court*. But as we'll see, it's not quite that simple.

As a rule, Wright approaches wordplay as a thing whose ludic side must be preserved, even if it means sacrificing the specific images thereby evoked. Replacing one bit of wordplay with another, she reproduces the spirit if not the literal substance of the original,

and does so with impressive ingenuity. Thus, Queneau's alliterative phrase "la crasse et le corbeau conjugués" (OC 2: 194) is rendered as "the fusion of filth and frock" (244); Narcense's twin preoccupations, "Faim, faim, et faim" and "Femmes, femmes, et femmes" (OC 2: 58), are neatly handled as "Hunger, famine, starvation" and "Honeymoons, females, skirts" (74). As for Mme Cloche's great harangue at the end (308), a real explosion of wordplay, Wright is careful to preserve its essence, retaining the text's repetitions ("the tempestuous tempest"), its internal rhymes ("the gale with its hail"), and its lapses into full-blown poetry ("the cyclone on its bicycle, the thunder with its icicles"). When the English equivalent of a French meteorological term does not lend itself to wordplay, she chooses a different weather event (thus "tornado" and "bourrasque" become "blizzard" and "gale"), assuming that what matters most in Cloche's tirade is less the precise elements she lists, and the attributes she gives them, than the fact that a variety of phenomena are laid out and their attributes ascribed to them solely on the basis of rhyme and homophony. This is the approach I myself would have chosen, and perhaps it's the only one that *could* be chosen, both because there is no way to duplicate Queneau's wordplay using direct equivalents and because in the end, what matters (I think) in this list (the "deep story") is its manipulation of the words that make it up, rather than the literal meaning of the phrases those manipulations produce.

But the rendering doesn't always work that smoothly, and the distance from the original isn't always that slight. Take, for instance, a neat little joke that comes as the café owner Hippolyte is cheerily responding to an order: "Oak, eh!" he says, whereupon, in a parenthetical aside, the narrator adds: "He learned this expression from the sailor [Yves Le Toltec]" (69). The French homophone of "OK" that Queneau puts into Hippolyte's mouth is "au quai [at the dock]" (OC 2: 54), an expression far more nautically motivated

than "Oak, eh!" We might thus very justifiably see this as a loss, but no sooner do I call it that than I begin to see ways in which it works much like the original does. I need only find a reason why Le Toltec could be associated with the words "Oak, eh!"—and I find it, in the fact that the sailor is a Breton, and that according to legend the ancient Celts of Brittany worshiped the oak tree. And then I find another, broader significance to those words: the oak and the dog are (or later became, or were later explained to be) Queneau's two personal emblems, so this is a winking reference to the author himself. Not only are those readings possible, they're confirmed by *Le chiendent* itself, which does indeed contain (and is even in part structured by) such self-referential cues, and whose final pages do indeed bring us back to France's Gallo-Celtic past.

Hippolyte's "Oak, eh!" is thus wrong, as any translation of a pun can only be wrong, but it's also right: we can do something with it. What we can do is not exactly what the French reader can do, but it's the same *kind* of thing. Wright's wordplay thus neatly illustrates the very commonsensical and necessary idea that "a good translation must generate the same effect aimed at by the original" (Eco, *Experiences* 44–45) but needn't necessarily convey every detail. But as always, it's not that simple, for Eco also tells us that translations that "say more (in other words, are richer in suggestion)" than the original may be very fine works in themselves, but they are not good translations (45). Eco has a wonderful example of this latter danger: translating Nerval's *Sylvie*, he discovered that the Italian word for the *fauvettes* that Sylvie keeps in a cage in her room is in fact *sylvie* (45), and this he finds simply too much. Any translator who inserted that serendipitous play on words "would be betraying the intentions" of the original (46). What Wright does with "au quai" is very similar to what Eco refuses to do with *fauvettes*; it's true that Queneau elsewhere does something like what Wright does, but not here. In this case, then,

the translation reproduces the effect (which is, for Eco, a good thing) while at the same time saying more than the text (which is not). Just as he and others do when faced with the question of what is true and what is not true in the text, Eco here attempts to set up a stop to the possibilities of the text, a stop that his own argument militates against. Translation simply refuses to abide by such easy distinctions (reproducing the effect versus saying more than the text), and I would argue that we must see this refusal as more than simply an element of translation's nature. Rather, it echoes a refusal already enacted by the text itself, as a more involved example of wordplay will suggest.

No reader of *Le chiendent* is likely to have forgotten the delightfully pointless riddles that Queneau quotes from the newspaper of X..., whose thickheaded wordplay simply cannot be got across in English if we translate them literally. And so, of course, Wright does not attempt to do so, but rewrites them as *different* riddles. Here is Wright's version:

- Q. What's the difference between an asthmatic pork butcher and a party given by intellectuals?
 A. One's all chine and wheeze, the other's all wine and cheese.
 Q. Why is a gambler like a man whose wife is called Elizabeth?
 A. They both like to lay their bet (Bet). (174)

The original, untranslatable riddles are even lamer:

- Q. Qu'est-ce qui s'occupe des bagages dans les gares?
 R. C'est un voleur, parce qu'il dévalise (*des valises*).
 Q. Qu'est-ce qui ressemble à une pomme?

- R. C'est un garçon de café, parce qu'on l'appelle avec son couteau(*on la pelle* [sic] *avec son couteau*). (OC 2: 138; italics in original)

Eco's distinction between the surface story and the deep story applies quite handily here. The literal substance of the riddles is purely superficial; their workings, on the other hand—their allusions to the book itself—are deep, or at least I assume they are, if only because they're so numerous. The first riddle's reference to theft reminds us that larceny (of Taupe's supposed treasure) is the prime motivation for almost all the novel's characters at one time or another, just as its reference to train stations evokes a setting of which the novel makes frequent use. The occult presence of thieves in a train station echoes the novel's omnipresent theme of invisible undersides, and indeed the presence of the word *dévalise* ([he] steals) in *des valises* (suitcases) echoes Saturnin's reflections on the interpenetration of presence and absence ("a full plate conceals an empty plate," he muses [191]). The second riddle, which plays on the phonetic confusion of words that could mean "one peels (an apple)" and "one calls (a waiter)," is perhaps slightly less rich; we can nonetheless hear in it an echo of the novel's many café settings, an evocation of Saturnin's planned epigraph for his book—"Why is it that, in cafés, cardplayers so often call the waiters Descartes" (68)—the image of cutting, and, once again, the whole tangled issue of semantic confusion.

In short, the deep side of these riddles—their rhymes with the rest of the novel—is both rich and meaningful, and Wright reproduces it magnificently, albeit by completely reworking their substance. In her version of the first riddle, the word "asthmatic" might refer to Queneau's own asthma, and to the several asthma-afflicted characters in his novels (including one minor figure in *Le chiendent*, according to Henri Godard [see OC 2: 1469 n. 5], a

café customer who "couldn't stop choking, drinking a yellowish potion straight out of a little bottle" [9]). Why "pork butcher"? In addition to the leitmotif of cutting, there is a specific reference to such a figure in Théo's dream ("he finds himself at a butcher's, he's handling some long knives" [40]), and Pierre Le Grand, too, dreams of slaughtering a rooster (40). As for the intellectuals' gathering, the distinction between Olympian cerebrality (intellectuals) and fleshly physicality (butchers) is the very one that we find in Queneau's emblematic oak and dog; and while the riddle speaks of a difference between these two things, the answer—by way of the slight permutations of the words used to define them—shows them to be intimately intertwined (another example of hidden undersides). Wright's other riddle is equally well motivated, for it too suggests that those two very different things are in fact the *same* thing. Like Queneau's second riddle, its more specific details are less extravagantly connected to the novel than those of the first: the only gambler in *Le chiendent* is, I believe, Narcense, who bets Bébé Toutout that he can guess his profession (47). It is certainly true that Narcense is at least as interested in sex as he is in gambling, but alas there is no Elizabeth in the novel with whom the name in the riddle might rhyme—unless we assume that the rhyme rather involves the habit of shortening proper names to form nicknames, something often seen in this novel and sometimes quite explicitly pointed to in a manner very similar to that of this riddle, as when the narrator introduces two minor characters as "Hector (Totor) and Dagobert (Bébert)" (102). Thus, by its juxtaposition of the high-flown, formal name Elizabeth and the informal Bet, this riddle might echo Queneau's preoccupation with classical versus popular language, and thereby, perhaps, the oak-versus-dog opposition cited above (even as, and this is worth underscoring again, the very existence of the pun reflects the novel's fascination with hidden truths, and with the mysterious workings of language).

In all these ways, Wright's riddles, though sharing neither words nor images with the manifest content of Queneau's riddles, can be found to perform essentially the same functions, just as Eco's model would recommend. Wright has neatly conveyed the deep story, sacrificing the surface. But then there is that other problem: do her riddles "say more" than the text's? In order to answer that, we would have to know *just how much the text says*, and I don't see how we can; I don't see how something as impalpable as connotation can be quantified. I'm not even sure that what I've found in Queneau's riddles is really "there," that I'm not finding rhymes simply because, to evoke Stanley Fish once again, I'm bent on finding them. This is what makes Queneau's riddles so brilliant: they look like so little, and then slowly begin to reveal, perhaps, "more," as if (in this novel, and I think in all novels) there is *always* something more beneath what is said, as if in fiction the seemingly gratuitous always conceals a whole network of motivated connections. That multiplication of sense is precisely the (rather terrifying) point of these silly little jokes, and indeed of the whole of *Le chiendent*. Wright's translation shows us that this multiplication does not end with the words Queneau has written: it's extendable, and it *must* be extendable in order to be meaningful, in order to say what it says. The extensibility is thus "in" the very words Queneau has written; we might even say that Wright's words are in Queneau's, or that their possibility is implied by Queneau's. In other words, it seems difficult to define how not to say more than those words precisely because it is their nature to say more than they say.

Or am I simply reading too much into these riddles? Am I finding motivated sense in Wright's perhaps gratuitous renderings simply because as a reader I am in the habit of trying to make sense of everything I see? Herschel Parker advances an argument very much like that in his *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons*, an intriguing

study of critical misreadings based on erroneous editions of various texts (editions riddled with misprints, or reprinting an author's bungled revision, or betraying the heavy hand of an inept editor, for instance). Although Parker writes that throughout that book he "celebrate[s] . . . (or sometimes commiserate[s] with) the reader's drive to make sense of what he is reading" (16), his tone sounds to me more contemptuous than anything else: "Confident that their aesthetic goosebumps are authorially planned, critics are lured into seeing authority where the passage they are reading contains nonsense" (11). Although Parker never speaks of translation in his book, the trap he is describing is one into which any reader of a translation might easily fall. I myself have chosen to leap into it in my reading of Wright's riddles, and it's certainly worth considering the possibility that the profound rightness I find in them is simply a result of a readerly reflex, that they do not actually do what Queneau's riddles do for the simple reason that they *aren't* Queneau's riddles, that I read them as doing what Queneau's riddles do simply out of a need for everything in the text to mean something. In Parker's system, it seems likely that *any* rendering of a pun would have to be discounted from our understanding of the novel—which is to say that wordplay should never be translated, I suppose, and even, since all writing involves some sort of play with language, that books should never be translated, or translations never read. Still, Parker's idea deserves to be taken seriously, and to that end I'd like to move on to another difficult bit of wordplay in *Le chiendent*.

To introduce a final thought appended to a letter destined for Mme Cloche, Clovis (apparently unsure of the spelling of *post-scriptum*) writes "peau s'écrit homme" (OC 2: 127), literally, "skin writes itself [or 'is written'] man." Obviously unable to duplicate this glorious (and highly unlikely) malapropism, Wright proposes "pose crypt" (159). Here again, to return briefly to Eco's distinc-

tion, we might wonder: is the deep story the fact that Clovis has gotten the words wrong, and the surface story the particular formula he has come up with, or is it the other way around? I'm not at all sure: again, that distinction of deep and surface seems far less useful than it might first appear. In any case, it's not difficult to find "deep" meaning in Queneau's version of Clovis's mistake. Those words might be a kind of oblique (and of course unknowing, on Clovis's part) reference to Étienne's transformation from silhouette to three-dimensional human being, for he is indeed a "skin" who, through writing (through the writing of this novel or his own "writing" of the world, in the Derridean sense: his discovery of differentiation), becomes a man ("a man, and one who thinks," Pierre Le Grand calls him [134]). Another moment of self-referentiality, then, which Wright's wording doesn't exactly seem to reproduce. Or does it? I throw what Parker calls my "drive to make sense" into gear, and immediately I find in Wright's formula the very self-referentiality that seems to be lacking in it. "Pose crypt": does that mean "First one poses, and then one is in the crypt"? If so, that would be a grim little summary of the course of a human life not at all at odds with the tone of *Le chiendent*, and indeed might explicitly evoke the sad fate of Ernestine: she pretends to be open to Taupe's advances, and then she dies. Or do those words have something to do with the laying of encrypted clues? Étienne is convinced that the world teems with such things, and *Le chiendent* itself most certainly does. Or perhaps, more elliptically, "Pose all the questions you like, you'll get nowhere in the end"? Étienne's story exactly—and perhaps the reader's as well.

Very well, then: I've found the self-referentiality in Wright's words. Now, am I guilty of the kind of untoward sense-making that Parker warns us against? Perhaps. Parker's argument is that we must deal with what the author intends to be in the text and with nothing else, and clearly, Queneau never intended the phrase

"pose crypt." On the other hand, Queneau *did* intend (I think) to place in his text a deformation of a Latin formula that can be read as having some sense of its own. Did he intend the French phrase thereby created as a reflexive reference to the novel itself? There I can't say; I don't really know that my reading of "peau s'écrit homme" is right, and I think this uncertainty is built into the phrase. Indeed, that uncertainty may be the very meaning of the phrase: in writing (or reading), the empty, the superficial, can take on a kind of meaning and fullness, though if that's the idea it's unclear if the sentence is meant to denounce an illusion or to celebrate a creation. In any case, seeing that phrase, I can't help but try to do something with it (no doubt Queneau fully understood the existence of that "need to make sense"—it's what his characters do with Taupe's unlikely door, but again, is that an admirable thing or a ridiculous one?), and the phrase lets me make meaning of it even as it stubbornly refuses to reveal any *definite* meaning. Now compare to that my reading of Wright's translation: is there any difference between the two processes? There is not: my reading of Wright's "wrong" translation works exactly as my reading of Queneau's inherently "right" original does. On what grounds, then, should we make a distinction between them? As always, I am not trying to disprove Parker's contention—of course it's preferable to read in the book only what's supposed to be in the book, as I suggested in chapter 1. My point is simply that *all* translation blurs the simple distinction between what is supposed to be in the text and what isn't (a distinction on which Parker's entire argument relies), but also, more importantly, that *this* translation, because it forces us to wonder if the reformulation does what the original does, forces us to wonder just what the original does, and thereby to realize that untoward sense-making (reading too much into the words) is precisely what it is supposed to drive us toward.

Parker believes all legitimate sense-making to be founded in the

author's true intention ("all authority in literature comes from the author" [16]), but another example from Wright's translation will place this whole idea of intention and authority in doubt—both the author's and the translator's. I refer to a moment late in the novel in which Cloche (now Missize Aulini) shows Étienne and Saturnin the proper way to count to ten, using for the numbers a series of homophones that seem, once again, to explicitly evoke various components of the novel itself. Here are Cloche's numbers: "nain" (dwarf, evoking Bébé Toutout), "deuil" (mourning: the funeral of Narcense's grandmother, for instance), "toit" (roof: here one thinks of Étienne's unfinished villa), "cartes" (cards: Descartes, and Saturnin's epigraph), "sein" (breast: Narcense's reveries, and the bare breasts of Sophie Isis), "scie" (saw: the cutting theme), "huître" (oyster: perhaps Taupe's hermetic existence, or the sea-life motif), "oeuf" (egg: Étienne's discovery of the egg-slicer, related perhaps to Cloche's profession as a midwife and abortionist), and "disque" (disc: the phonograph record playing in Hippolyte's bar? Étienne's original flatness?) (OC 2: 245). Wright's list runs as follows: "won, tool, tree, fore!, fife, sick, zen, ate, nein!, in tent" (309). Wright had a severely limited range of choices for this particular rendering: she could only choose homophones of the English words for the numbers one to ten, many of which nevertheless seem to work quite effortlessly. "Tool" might refer to the male member (as in, for instance, Thémistocle's model of a phallus made of bread [211]), "tree" the branch from which Narcense hangs himself (and of course the "bark-tree" of the translation's original title, or Queneau's oak), "fife" the march to war in the final chapter, "sick" Ernestine's death or the general atmosphere of unwholesomeness that hangs over the novel, "ate" Ernestine's wedding dinner, "nein!" Théo's doomed attempt to learn his German lesson, "in tent" the sort of primitive military encampment in which this very recitation takes place. Other allusions are perhaps

a bit more obscure, but not egregiously so: "zen" could refer to Queneau's fascination with Eastern thought, "won" underscores that Cloche's side has indeed triumphed in the war, and "fore!" is certainly a most apposite warning for any character in the book.

In every case, then, we can easily create connections between the words in Wright's list and the plot of the novel, but the fact is that other words might have given us precisely the same impression. "One" could have been rendered as "wan," and I might have argued that it reflects the atmosphere of unwholesomeness I've already spoken of. "Sick" could have been "sex," requiring no exegetical gymnastics whatever on my part. "Tool" could have been "toot" (echoing the train whistle [25], and more generally bringing out the important role that trains play throughout the novel), and "tree" could have been "free," which would be meaningful precisely because it expresses what the characters of the novel emphatically are not. In other cases it seems next to impossible to come up with an alternative to Wright's word, and this is troubling in itself: if she chooses "fife" because it is the only plausible homophone for "five"—because the word was forced upon her, with no choice on her part—then it begins to seem that a word can be "right" purely by accident. And in fact the same could be said of Queneau's words: perhaps "huître," for instance, reflects no actual authorial intention or choice, and is there simply because it's the only respectable homophone for "huit." And yet I can still see that word as meaningful; would it not appear, then, that even in the original meaning arises independent of intention? And is this not perfectly confirmed by the list of words we find in the translation? If so—and I find it unarguable—then it is not simply Parker's argument that is undermined, but our whole notion of "rightness," inside or outside translation: the right word is not necessarily limited to "what the word is supposed to be,"

but spreads and blurs into the realm of the purely contingent, the random, the unfixed. Try your hand at translation someday, and you will discover that this is a literal (and highly uncomfortable) truth, but I would argue that it applies to all *reading* as well, no matter what Parker's argument would like to affirm.

But in these numbers there still exists one important parallel between the original and the translation: a pun is translated as a pun, and so in one sense the intention of the original remains. Suppose, however, that this intention too is neglected, that wordplay is translated not as wordplay but literally, as if it were a perfectly straightforward expression. An example of this can be found in a passage from Ernestine's wedding dinner. Angry at his wife's suggestion that he can never quite manage to break through to the big time, the magician Peter Tom shoots back at her: "What does that make me look like now, eh? A half-wit." He then turns to his tablemates, and, as the leg of mutton is being set down on the table, says, "Here, to show you that I'm someone after all, would you like me to make the leg of mutton disappear? The whole leg, or just the pope's eye?" (194). This passage is amusing enough in itself, but its core is missing. These two lines revolve around two meanings of the word *noix*, literally "walnut," but which in slang means something like "fool" or "dope," and in specialized standard usage refers to the savory center of a roast (the "eye"). Peter Tom thus fears looking like a *noix*, and asks the assembled guests if they would like to see him make the mutton—or only the *noix* (of the mutton)—disappear. The pun is either gratuitous (an anodyne little joke, fit for a festive gathering such as this) or not, for "to make the *noix* disappear" almost sounds as though it could mean "to make Peter-Tom-the-*noix* disappear," which is in fact precisely what will happen in the final section of that chapter, where it will be hinted that Peter Tom is simply a mask worn by

Pierre, which he can put on and take off at will (229). Depending on the interpretation of this pun, its literal rendering in the translation may or may not be seen as a loss. If we assume that Pierre Troc and Pierre Le Grand are the same person (and this *is* an assumption), and if we assume that this pun is meant to underscore their oneness (another assumption), then it can only be wrong to translate it literally. Unless, of course, Wright is respecting the spirit of the book precisely by not giving us the equivalency between those two words too overtly; by concealing it while at the same time leaving it visible (the idea of something disappearing nonetheless remains in her wording, which is perhaps enough), is she not doing precisely what Queneau does so often in the novel, creating a half-perceptible connection that requires the reader's interpretive cooperation to become wholly visible? Again, why could this wrong translation not be right?

But of course there are times when a literal translation of word-play seems far more indefensible than this, when a pun rendered straightforwardly is not a preservation of something in the text, but a destruction. I have two examples of this, which rather curiously both come from a single passage, depicting Théo's conversation with Sensitif and Nécessaire on the confrontation between Narcense and Le Grand and Étienne. At one point in this conversation, the narrator of the original writes "Théo rit (*sic*)" (OC 2: 130). "Théo rit" literally means "Théo laughs," of course, but it is also phonetically indistinguishable from *théorie*; hence Queneau's *sic*. The translation reads simply "Théo laughs (*sic*)" (164). Once again, there is nothing Wright could have done; even by replacing the act of laughing with something else, it's difficult to see how she could have derived a pun of this sort from Théo's name, given that those two syllables do not begin any English word that I can think of (changing Théo's name to simply Theo might have led to something, but is it worth changing a character's name—and

making of it a name unpronounceable in French—for the sake of one pun?) (Don't answer that question too lightly, because whichever answer you choose will be wrong.) Deleting the *sic* would perhaps have made the most sense, since there is nothing left for it to refer to. But its retention can be justified, I think, in two different ways. For one thing, so much of *Le chiendent*'s narration seems to insist on confronting us with questions we can't answer (Ernestine's demise, the reasons for and the logistics of France and Italy's regression into Gaul and Etruria, the identity of Pierre Le Grand); if this line plunges a reader into incomprehension (and it must, I think), then this simply reproduces and confirms an experience that the reader is *supposed* to undergo with some regularity throughout the novel. Indeed, the conversation in which this line occurs is itself strongly marked by ignorance and impenetrability: Sensitif and Nécessaire can see by Théo's air "that he knows more than he's going to tell them and that he's going to tell them more than he knows" (161); Nécessaire at one point reacts to Théo's revelations "inexplicably" (163), and at another point "incomprehensively" (or, as the original has it, "incompréhensiblement" [OC 2: 130]—is that the same thing as "incomprehensively" or not?); Queneau muddies the minor characters' names, and so forth. If incomprehension is an important part of this book, and particularly of this scene, surely a little more incomprehension imposed by the translation can't be entirely out of order. But there is perhaps a better argument to be made here. Queneau's line plays on the slightly treacherous quality of language: it makes us think that, in French, there is no way to say "Théo laughs" without making a pun—and what Wright's translation shows us is that there is no way to make that pun work in English. In both cases, language slips from the grasp of the person using it (a truth that we find exposed again and again in the novel itself). Wright reproduces, differently, and in a way that the reader of the translation cannot see

but that remains real and present nonetheless, the very truth that we find in Queneau's line—what I believe it would be justifiable to call that line's "deep" meaning, to use Eco's term. I hope this doesn't sound like a forced rationalization; I realize that Wright's words do not translate Queneau's joke. The difficulty is, however, that they do translate that joke's *meaning*—depending of course on what we mean by "meaning."

One final example before we leave the realm of wordplay. In the course of that same conversation, Théo describes the damage Narcense has wrought in a hotel room of the town of X..., and speaks the following strange sentence: "And there, it was as if he was delirious, a very thin man, he wrecked everything" (164). The words "it was as if he was delirious, a very thin man" are Wright's translation of Queneau's "il a eu comme le délire, homme très mince" (OC 2: 131), a phonetic approximation—more or less in the style of Raymond Roussel—of the French pronunciation of *delirium tremens*. Here, more dramatically even than with the *sic* discussed above, the reader of the translation can only react with blank mystification, for the line makes not the slightest sense. In French too it makes no sense at first, but only at first. The French reader will understand perfectly through the words "le délire"; the next words will at first seem meaningless, but the punctuation will suggest that they stand in apposition to the noun "délire." The French reader will thus, on first reading, understand these lines to mean "He fell into something like delirium, [which is] a very thin man." This metaphorical image of delirium may well strike the reader as a true one (evocative as it is of desperation, torment), and particularly true in the case of Narcense, who is not thin (he is even "fattish" [60]), but who is, as we read a few pages before this conversation, desperately hungry (see, for instance, 152), and who in his hunger invents wild, dreamlike stories to entertain himself, which eventually lead him into sexual fantasies that could well be

qualified as delirious. And then, after undergoing that first pure incomprehension ("what is that doing there?"), and then a certain kind of comprehension ("it's a generalized poetic image, a metaphor for delirium in general"), then another ("it's a generalized image that applies particularly to this character"), that French reader will finally arrive at yet another understanding ("it's a play on *delirium tremens*"), this latter realization not erasing the earlier ones, nor even really transforming them, but (in a process well described by Fish) casting a new sort of light upon them, showing us where they came from. On first encountering the phrase we find it gratuitous, and we don't understand; then we realize that understanding is possible, and so the phrase loses its gratuity—and then, as an even fuller understanding occurs to us, we see that it *is* in fact more or less gratuitous (since it's simply a transcription of a pronunciation), or rather that from a seemingly gratuitous act can come something endowed with genuine or potential meaning that changes our way of conceiving the thing described.

But what about the American reader's experience of the translated phrase? We will of course begin in a state of incomprehension identical to that of a French reader. And then we will try to make "a very thin man" fit somewhere; given that "delirious" is an adjective rather than Queneau's noun, those words can't stand in apposition to it, so we can only assume that they should be connected to "it was as if he was." We will thus understand the sentence to mean "it was as if he was delirious, it was as if he was a very thin man," or perhaps "it was as if he was delirious, very thin man that he was." Knowing that Narcense himself is not thin, we can now glimpse the severity of his despair, his frailty, perhaps his crazed energy at this moment. And that, I think, is as far as we will go: we won't see the higher gratuity that allows this not-gratuitous-after-all phrase to exist, and so we still won't have quite the definitive understanding of what it's doing there

that a French reader could have. For a French reader, all the loose ends are tied up where this phrase is concerned—he or she knows what it means and how it got into the text—which cannot be the case for an American reader. We will have gone through the same experience, but on the basis of a slightly different understanding (for us, it is not delirium that is like a very thin man, but Narcense in his delirious state, which is not quite the same thing), and on a smaller scale (we don't see the true source of the line, which reduces its scope).

And here is the wrongness that makes a rightness. Because it allows us to understand the source of the phrase, the French text might encourage us to believe that it is knowing the source that matters (the transmuted phrase takes on its full perceptibility and its full force only when its Latin roots have been uncovered). At the very least, those words must coexist with the Latin words, but I think the effect of knowing the source is greater than that: I believe the reader, having discovered the Latin source of the wordplay, will tell him- or herself that *that* is its true nature ("It's a play on a Latin phrase"), at which point the sense of the words produced by this play becomes much less important to see, or at least secondary to (because derived from) the Latin. Wright's translation works in precisely the opposite way: it reminds us that in any pun *the literal meaning matters too*. If a pun can be experienced only as a thing having two meanings at once, then the existence of each of those two meanings separately is perhaps reduced; if literal meaning is subsumed by its participation in the pun, then it is attenuated. What we find in the translation is the straight meaning in all its force, which is *also* a part of the double meaning. Needless to say, the translation cuts something out of the expression, because we don't know enough to understand it fully. Oddly, though, the French reader's full understanding of the expression *also* cuts something out of it: that reader knows too much, in a way. He

or she might in the end see primarily the *source* of the wordplay, and only very secondarily its explicit meaning, like a reader of Raymond Roussel so fixated on the writing process that he or she can't see the wonderful images thereby produced. There is a sense, then, in which Wright's translation might be considered not only as good as Queneau's line, but better, *precisely because it is wrong*.

Have I gone too far? My own sense is that it is remarkably difficult to go too far in this domain, remarkably difficult to draw a line beyond which a given translation can be said to be simply wrong. Eco attempts to do so in his *Experiences in Translation*: given the Italian sentence "Dio ha creato il mondo," he writes that "no reasonable person could say that 'The Devil created the world' or 'God did not create the world' would be acceptable translations" (9). But as an unreasonable person, I can easily imagine circumstances in which either might be entirely justifiable. Suppose this sentence came at the end of a long, detailed discussion of the evolutionary process, laying out all the incontrovertible evidence for the truth of that theory; would the point of this ironic coda not be to convince the reader of the absurdity of the idea that God created the world, and so would its sense not be that God *didn't* create the world? Or suppose that the sentence came at the end of a long denunciation of the miseries inflicted on humankind by the natural world—famine, earthquakes, tsunamis, and so on. There the ironic coda would suggest that it is not a beneficent entity that created our world, but clearly the opposite. In short, what Eco calls the deep sense of the expression would be the exact opposite of its surface meaning; should the translator choose to convey that deep meaning explicitly, in what way could the resulting translation—in Eco's own system—be considered unacceptable? One might argue over the *aesthetic* value of the translator's decision to say overtly what the original only implies, but the translation itself, as a conveyance of meaning, would be entirely accurate. I realize,

of course, that Eco gives us that sentence without the kind of context I have tacked onto it; but unless we assume that unless otherwise indicated all sentences given without context are to be taken literally, I don't see what difference that makes. Eco clearly intends this as an indisputable example, but the fact is that he himself already, implicitly, disputes it. Given this, it seems at least possible to claim that a translation can be right precisely because of its wrongness.

Even I have the impression that I'm drifting into sophistry here, but I can't help it. This odd interpretability of a translation that some might call partial or flawed has an infuriatingly persistent power to make every dubious rendering seem perfectly sensible and even meaningful. Wright's translation includes two passages, both of which seek to preserve the original's italicization of a word, that in an earlier draft of this chapter I tried to define as outright mistakes; rereading my discussion, however, I found I could no longer believe in what I was saying. The first comes from a passage describing a dinner at the home of the silhouette and his wife, and reads "On apporte des nouilles. *On*, c'est la femme" (Someone brings in noodles. That someone is the wife) (OC 2: 9); clearly, the italicization of the second "on" is meant to convey that it is a kind of citation of the first ("when I say *on*, I'm referring to the wife"). The second comes after Étienne learns that Saturnin is in the habit of reading mail addressed to Narcense, the one tenant of the apartment building he oversees, and wonders "comment il se fait que [Saturnin] lise les lettres de *son* locataire" (how it is that [Saturnin] reads his lodger's letters) (OC 2: 48); here too the italics serve to indicate a citation (in Étienne's mind), but also his bewilderment at the singular form of the possessive—at the fact that Saturnin has only one lodger. There is of course no way to translate the sense of those italics into English. In the first passage, unless the first "on" is (jarringly) translated as "one" or "someone," there is no way to

reproduce the second sentence's repetition of the pronoun. In the second passage, given that English makes no distinction between possessives referring to plural and to singular objects, there is no way to express with one word Étienne's surprise at the singular rather than plural sense of "his." Wright chooses to retain Queneau's italics, rendering the former passage as "The noodles are brought. *Are* brought—by the wife, of course" (13) and the second as "how it happens that her brother reads *his* tenant's letters" (62), and I was intending to call this move a mistake, adhering to the letter of the text at the expense of intelligibility. But now I'm not so sure. If from "*are* brought" we infer an insistence on the author's part that there are many noodles in the dish rather than just one, and from "*his* tenant" an apparent belief on Étienne's part that it would be perfectly reasonable to read the mail of *someone else's* tenant, then we are seeing a meaning that is not present in the original, but we are, after all, seeing a meaning, and one that is not all that difficult to incorporate into the novel itself. Compare, for instance, that odd "*are* brought" with the novel's weirdly protracted explanation of the fact that two siblings do not bear the same first name (219): the difference is not great. In that latter case, the novel shows that it can sometimes overstate the obvious for the purpose of making a joke; why would the latter case not be merely another example of this? As for Étienne's odd reaction, could his naïveté not simply reflect the recentness of his discovery of the world around him, in the manner, say, of his fascination with the egg-slicer? I repeat, this is not what we find in Queneau's book, but no sooner do I set out to condemn it as a departure than, irritatingly, I begin to see ways in which it needn't be one at all.

This phenomenon—this ability to turn a mistake into a meaning, wrong into right—is too insistent not to mean something, too unstoppable not to be sending us some sort of message about reading, or about textuality. I've already mentioned several times the

possibility of seeing the text as a kind of solid object, every part of which must be present in order for the text to be itself (this is why it is at least possible to claim that a copy with a typographical error is not exactly the book, and this is why Eco and others devote so much energy to defining what must be and what cannot be in the text in order for it to be itself). I remain convinced that this is one way in which any text exists. But as I've also sought to suggest, a text is at the same time a kind of fluid substance, its borders penetrable and amorphous. The insistent potential rightness of even a wrong translation shows us that there is nothing abstract about that fluidity, and that the permeability does not only occur on the edges of the work: it inhabits the very words "inside" the text.

I'm not talking here about the famous indeterminacy of meaning; rather, my point is that meaning can be made of virtually anything, and that once meaning is made, it becomes (to a reader's eye) just as determinate, just as defensible, as any other meaning. Read Wright's translation alone, and everything will "work"; meanings will seem clear and even necessary. The fact that, compared to the original, they *aren't* necessary (that they depart in one way or another from the original's inherently necessary meaning) does not make the meaning of anything that Queneau wrote indeterminate; it only means that determinate meaning can be made in an indeterminable number of ways, and even in ways that at first glance seem perfectly alien to that meaning.

I am thus making an argument very similar to one that Fish so compellingly proposes throughout *Is There a Text in This Class?*. Fish asserts that the reader's assumptions about the text make certain meanings available and even inevitable, and other readings impossible, and that it is only those assumptions that determine those meanings. Reading Wright's translation, I have consistently relied on the assumption that rhyme (for instance) matters in Que-

neau, and so I find rhymes in Wright's translation, and I assume a "rightness" about her renderings because they conform to my assumptions about how Queneau's text works. I greatly admire Fish's simple, powerful, airtight theory. Among other things, I find it a wonderful antidote to the pronouncements on translation that we saw at the beginning of this chapter. The number of words and commas in a sentence seems vitally important to Burton Raffel only because he is operating under the assumption that this number is important; to a translator with different assumptions, that feature of the text will have nothing like the same kind of importance, and both are equally right in the context of their own assumptions. We should note that Fish's theory makes life quite difficult for a translator; if our mission is to convey what is "in the text," then there's nothing comforting about the knowledge that there can be a great many things in the text whose existence our assumptions will not allow us to see. But at least Fish allows us to *read* translation more meaningfully than we might without it—as a reflection of the translator's assumptions, and as a challenge to or modification of our own. For that matter, Fish's model allows us to resolve many of the questions we posed in the *last* chapter as well: old men have gray hair if we assume that they have gray hair, manuscript events are real in the text if we assume them to be, and so on.

But there is something in the open-and-shut quality of his argument (that things are in the text because we're prepared to see them) that rankles me. It seems such an all-encompassing, inescapable system, but we've seen other theories undermined by the other book here, and on one point at least Fish's is no less vulnerable. It relies strongly on a kind of *certainty* (of its own premise, among other things), and certainty is one thing that translation routinely undoes.

Le chiendent's first real description of Bébé Toutout tells us that he has on his head "une espèce de casquette à oreillettes d'une espèce rare" (a sort of cap with earflaps of an unusual sort) (OC 2: 191); in *Witch Grass* this becomes "a sort of cap, with earflaps of an unusual sort" (240). That comma changes something: its presence tells us that it is no longer the cap that is unusual, but only the earflaps. (I have no idea who inserted that comma, whether it was Wright or an overzealous copy-editor, but it makes little difference: *someone* thought it should be there.) Perhaps—almost certainly—this is one of those changes that don't really matter; no doubt the only thing that counts is that Bébé Toutout's cap is strange in one way or another, and that it is described in this amusingly clumsy way requiring two uses of the word "sort." But this—the question of whether it is the cap or the earflaps that are unusual—remains a point on which Wright and I, as readers, disagree. Can Fish's notion of interpretive communities help me to understand why?

In all honesty, I can't see how it could. Fish tells us that

[i]nterpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. . . . [T]hese strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than . . . the other way around. . . . [T]he assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text . . . [that] its interpretive strategies demand and call into being. . . . [This] explains why there are disagreements and why they can be debated in a principled way: not because of a stability in texts, but because of a stability in the makeup

of interpretive communities and therefore in the opposing positions they make possible. (171)

I agree in every way with Fish's idea; I see its truth demonstrated again and again in my classroom, in my conversations with colleagues, and in my reading of criticism. But in the case of Wright's and my disagreement over the interpretation of that phrase, I simply can't see how it applies. I can imagine no orientation—critical, grammatical, philosophical, or otherwise—that would induce anyone to read this phrase in one way rather than another. Perhaps it seems funnier to think of only the earflaps being odd; perhaps certain of Queneau's readers are more certain than others that he is a humorist. But I don't believe that can explain the disagreement on this one point; for that, Barbara Wright would have to be just a bit more convinced of the importance of Queneau's verbal humor than I am, and I would cite her literal treatment of "délire, homme très mince" to suggest that this isn't exactly true. So perhaps the interpretive stance would involve not any understanding of Queneau, but purely a particular view of grammar, and Barbara Wright or her copy-editor is more likely than I to assume that a prepositional phrase necessarily modifies the noun directly before it; and yet she translates "un fouet à mayonnaise avec un petit entonnoir" (OC 2: 42) as a "mayonnaise whip with a little funnel" (55), so if it is some grammatical predisposition that underlies the portrayal of Bébé Toutout's cap, it isn't determinative.

Perhaps I'm taking Fish's idea too literally; perhaps I shouldn't be looking for explicit *definitions* of Wright's and my respective communities. Certainly, Fish seems reluctant to define any individual community in any concrete way. He tells us that readers who approach Milton's *Lycidas* as a pastoral will "write" a different text from those who approach it as "a set of fantasies and defenses," for instance (165); he writes that even such apparently

undeniable formal features as line endings exist only by way of a reader's "perceptual strategies" (165), which implies that there is another interpretive community that does not perceive such things as meaningful. But these occasional, partial, and essentially ad hoc descriptions of certain interpretive strategies of various communities don't really define those communities, and I can't help thinking that it would be useful to have some more substantive way of understanding them. If such communities exist, in all their determinative force, should they not be fully describable? That is, should it not be possible to list their guiding principles, and to predict their readings on that basis? Should any reader's individual act of interpretation not be explainable by a definition of the specific community to which he or she belongs? These are perhaps idle questions, but their source isn't: they arise from my inability to explain what Wright and I are doing differently when we interpret that phrase in our two different ways. If we belong to two different communities (on this one point, at least), then those communities should be definable, and I don't see how they might be.

It's worth noting, too, that the idea of interpretive communities is itself an interpretation (of reading rather than of the text). Now, if this is true, then by Fish's own system it must be an interpretation arrived at under the pressure of an interpretive community, but Fish asserts rather that such communities are an inevitable, immanent component of reading, and not the result of an interpretation of reading. Why shouldn't it be claimed that he is "writing" them into the experience of reading just as another reader might "write" line endings into a poem under the effect of his or her own interpretive community? For Fish, the idea of interpretive communities *escapes* interpretation, but perhaps he sees them—perhaps they exist in the texts he reads—only because his own interpretive community forces him to find them. For another reader, perhaps they don't exist at all. Is that reader wrong? Unless I'm seriously

misreading Fish, he would have to answer in the affirmative, and this his own system forbids.

Rather than rely on the notion of interpretive communities, then, I would prefer simply to say that often there is no particular way to explain why people read a sentence the way they do, that interpretation is far less certain, far less orderly, than even Fish makes it sound. Wright's translation proves this for me again and again. In one of his letters to Théo, Narcense remarks that his uncle thought it would be "*human*" to spare his dog the indignities of old age by hanging him, and wonders "whether it wouldn't be *human* to apply the same treatment" to Théo, so as to spare him a sordid adolescence (52–53; emphasis in original). The French reads "*humain*" (OC 2: 40; emphasis in original): should the translation thus read "human," or should it read "humane"? My own choice would unquestionably be the latter, but Wright's translation makes me question myself: how do I know that "humane" is the right word here? Wright knows full well, of course, that *humain* can mean either "human" or "humane," and that either is (I think) possible in this context, and where I would choose "humane," she chooses "human." Why? What did she see? What have I missed? Similarly, Queneau's "There's no cash money, there are only fictive bank transactions" (OC 2: 187) is rendered as "There isn't any gospel, there are only works of fiction" (235). Why? What necessitated this change? Again, what has she seen that I haven't? Queneau's "She worked well, a lot, no, she wasn't afraid of a little hard work" (OC 2: 170) is translated as "She worked well; not a lot, no, but she wasn't afraid of hard work" (213); "a person sitting on a pin cushion" (OC 2: 162) as "something sitting on a pin cushion" (203); "Comment faire?" (How to do that? OC 2: 136) as "What for?" (171), and so on. Please don't misunderstand: these aren't mistakes. They arise not from a failure to understand the French on Wright's part, but, in a variety of ways, from a difference

of interpretation between Wright and myself, a difference that I think resists explication. Compare any translation—my own included—to the original, and you will find a dizzying number of examples of this phenomenon. Like Fish, I think such discrepancies mean something; unlike him, I believe they mean above all that interpretation—the “mere” interpretation of words—cannot simply be predicted by any system whatsoever, not even (or particularly not) one as lucid as his.

This is all the more true in that these puzzling differences often show me not only that I don’t understand where they came from but also that my own interpretive skills are unable to say with any certainty what they or the text actually means. I have an example, of course, from that oft-cited last section of part 5: the monologue of a mysterious figure who first presents himself as a gypsy, then pulls off that mask to don the mask of a dead man, then pulls off that mask in turn. In the last lines of that passage we find this sentence: “Then he yawned, thought for a moment about the appearance of a professor of white magic, and then chose his usual appearance. Pierre yawned again” (229). As we know, this is a most important passage, as it radically disrupts the reader’s understanding of who (or what) Pierre is; most immediately, it strongly suggests that Pierre Troc and Pierre Le Grand, each of whom refers to himself as a professor (or student) of white magic (180, 279), are in fact the same person. But I find it curious that Wright’s sentence reads “the appearance of a professor of white magic” where Queneau’s reads “the appearance of *the* [du] professor of white magic” (OC 2: 182; my emphasis). Queneau’s line makes it obvious (I think) that the “appearance” in question is that specifically of Peter Tom (the stage name, let us remember, of Pierre Troc), which means that Peter Tom is another facet of Pierre, and so on. The indefinite article in Wright’s translation erases this specificity: it’s no longer clear that Pierre Le Grand

is Pierre Troc. He does still have the ability to change identities, but now “professor of white magic” is not an identity attached to any one character. It’s simply an identity like any other, whose recurrence here merely reiterates the book’s general atmosphere of occultness. In short, while Wright’s translation does not destroy *all* the sense of this sentence, I think it destroys something very important—except that, on further reflection, it occurs to me that “a” can also mean “the”: the indefinite article in Wright’s sentence might imply something like “a certain professor . . .,” something like “a professor of white magic who shall remain nameless, but you know who I mean.” Am I then misreading Wright when I complain about the change she has made? And for that matter, how do I know I’m reading Queneau correctly? After all, could his “the” not mean “a”? Could his sentence not imply something like “the classic professor,” something like “the appearance we would all recognize as that of the standard professor of white magic”? What Wright’s apparent mistranslation shows me is that I am unable to decide whether or not it *is* a mistranslation, both because I am unsure of the sense of the word in the translation and because I am unsure of the sense of the word in the original (and I realize this only because of the translation: reading only the original, I would surely see “the” as meaning “the,” and think no more about it—but is that a better reading or a worse one?).

Or again: I am surprised to find that Wright translates the phrase “ça avance mon grand ouvrage” (OC 2: 232) from Saturnin’s drunken apostrophe to his (or the novel’s) readers as “it helps my great work on its way” (294) and not as something like “my great work is moving forward.” Saturnin’s sentence could indeed be read as Wright reads it, and it could also be read as I read it. Had Saturnin included a comma after “avance,” there would be no ambiguity—Wright’s reading would be wrong—but there is none here, though it should be said that it would be possible to omit the

comma and have the sentence mean just the same thing. (See, for instance, the similarly structured and unambiguous phrase "c'était rare les gens qui s'appellent Marcel" [OC 2: 48], without a comma after "rare.") Turning to the context solves nothing, of course: although the referent of Wright's "it" strikes me as extremely unclear (*what* helps his great work on its way?), Saturnin is about to mention something that could be seen as helping his work advance (the ever-increasing page number on his manuscript [or in the book]), and he is, after all, dead drunk, so we needn't necessarily be surprised if he jumbles the logical order of his phrases. I still find my own reading far more "right," but I don't exactly see why. The same goes for Saturnin's reflective judgment, some pages later, of the now-ending novel: "Les passages philosophiques, les miens, c'est pas fort" (OC 2: 246), which Wright translates as "The philosophical passages, my dears, they aren't so hot" (309), and which I would have translated as "The philosophical passages, my own [or 'mine,' or 'my passages,' in the sense of 'the ones I'm responsible for'] . . ." The question here is the sense of the words "les miens": do they refer back to "passages," or do they refer to the people to whom Saturnin is speaking, as Wright's version seems to? Or does the "my dears" in her sentence refer to those very philosophical passages, expressing Saturnin's fondness for that component of the novel? Or again, here is Pierre reflecting on the fact that it would be wrong to tell Étienne that Théo ran away with Mme Pigeonnier (at least I *think* that's what he's talking about): "It was then that Pierre realized sadly that he couldn't parade all Catherine's revelations; he was always forgetting that this young man had to keep up the image of a paterfamilias. Another thing he wouldn't have been able to do" (171). In French, the last sentence of that passage reads, "Encore quelque chose qu'il ne saurait pas" (OC 2: 136), which I would translate as "Another thing he would never know." On first reading Wright's sentence, I assume

that the "he" in question is Pierre, and the "thing he wouldn't have been able to do" is tell Étienne all he knows, whereas my reading of Queneau's sentence is that the "he" is Étienne, and the thing he wouldn't know (and indeed Étienne has just been talking about the difficulty of knowing things [see WG 169–70]) is whatever it is that Pierre wants to reveal, most likely that Théo's disappearance was in fact a flight with Mme Pigeonnier. The latter reading seems to me obvious, and I'm surprised not to find it in *Witch Grass*, and yet now that I think of it, I can imagine a way in which Queneau's sentence could mean precisely what Wright has written (if we assume that in the phrase "il ne saurait pas" the conditional of *savoir* has, as it often does, the sense of "to be able" [the sentence still doesn't quite work, but it almost does]). Furthermore, I can also imagine a way in which Wright's sentence means precisely what I think Queneau's sentence means (if we read Wright's "he" to mean Étienne, and "to do" as standing in for "to find out"). I can even see how my own sentence might be construed to mean precisely what I believe Wright's sentence means (if we assume my "he" to refer to Pierre, and "wouldn't know" as "wouldn't know of," referring to the experience of telling Étienne this unpleasant truth). If a translation serves above all to show us that we shouldn't be so sure we fully understand the original, or the translation itself, how can we take for granted any reading of the original or of the translation?

One last example, an enigmatic little line spoken by Shibolet to Le Grand in which the former is comparing his flashy new car to the latter's: "What's your gas consumption like? I don't get more than nine or ten out of mine, but I do up to ninety-five on the straight" (139). The original reads "Tu dépenses combien d'essence? Moi, pas plus de trente litres, et en ligne droite, je tape le cent cinquante" (OC 2: 109), which literally equates to: "How much gas do you use? As for me, no more than thirty liters, and

on a straightaway I can hit 150." The uncertainties here are legion. In Queneau's sentence, "150" must be a speed, "thirty liters" a quantity of gas. It takes Shibolet no more than thirty liters to do something—but what? To reach X... from Paris? Perhaps: one could indeed, assuming a rate of some fifteen miles to the gallon, reach the seaside resorts nearest Paris—most notably those in Normandy—on thirty liters of gas (but do not wonder if this implies that X... is in Queneau's home province of Normandy, lest you become one of those "fussy" readers that Eco warned us about). But in any case the translation only muddies matters: I can't imagine what calculation Wright performed to transform that "thirty liters" into "nine or ten" (nine or ten what? miles per gallon? Perhaps, but I myself still can't derive nine or ten from thirty: thirty liters is 7.8 gallons, so where does "nine or ten" come from?). If Shibolet means that he uses no more than thirty liters to get from Paris to X..., and that despite this low fuel consumption the car can go very fast (up to 150 kilometers per hour, which is to say exactly ninety miles per hour), then one wonders why Wright has changed Shibolet's "and" to "but," reversing the relationship of the two phrases, from "good and even better" to "not so good, but on the other hand good," just as we must wonder why Shibolet's "150" has become "up to ninety-five," which is to say five kilometers per hour faster than Shibolet claims.

To summarize: I don't understand how Queneau's French figures could have become the English figures in the translation, and I don't understand why the translation has Shibolet denigrating his fuel consumption when the original has him praising it (if that is indeed what he is praising, and if that is indeed what the translation has him saying). But what really matters here is that I can't claim to understand either Queneau's sentence or Wright's, and that I have read both sentences many times without realizing my

failure. The ultimate effect of this sort of phenomenon—far more widespread in translation than I think we might ever guess—is not only to make us doubt the reading of the original but to impose on us a realization of the frailty, the partiality, the blindness of reading in general.

We thus end this chapter exactly where we began it. Think back to Clovis's restatement of Étienne and Le Grand's conversation. I said there that I wasn't sure what the original was saying, and equally unsure if the translation was or wasn't saying whatever that is. I apologize for the circularity, but not abjectly: translation always brings us back to uncertainty in one form or another, and there's simply no way to get beyond it. At the same time, I consider translation a healthy corrective for any theory of the text that insists on its easy definability. All the theories we considered in the last chapter are predicated on the idea that the text is fundamentally understandable; all the theorists of translation we considered in this chapter, too, operate on the assumption that the original text will make clear what it is we are supposed to be getting across when we translate it, just as Fish's model assumes understanding on the basis of a given reader's approach. Often this is the case, no doubt. But—invisibly, infuriatingly—the translation time and again shows us the opposite, shows us how much we really are failing to understand. Haunted as our reading is by that uncertainty, whether we know it or not, it's difficult to see how we can affirm anything about intention, what is and isn't in the text, true and false statements about the text, and so on and so forth. If we take translation seriously, it becomes hard to understand reading at all. I don't claim that one must be able to translate a passage in order to understand it, but I suspect that this unpleasant idea may be closer to true than is generally acknowledged; and given all the uncertainty I've tried to show here, no doubt certain conclusions must be drawn.

It's wrong, in a sense, to read a translation alongside the original: that's not what it's for. When people do so, their goal is primarily to see where the translation has departed from the original (solely for the purpose of "appraising [the translation's] worth" [Eco, *Experiences* 119]), or how it has handled the difficulties of the original, which is an interesting study in itself. But the one question people do not ask, in my experience, is what this other version of the text does to our understanding of the original text. Just as people commonly read manuscripts in order to see how the text came to be as it was, but do not allow the manuscript to trouble their understanding of the text, people who compare a translation to a text do so, in a sense, in the second degree, keeping the translation at arm's length from the text. If just once we refuse to do this—if we allow the translation to pose the questions about the text and about reading that *it does pose*, whether we want to see them or not—we will find so much to learn, and to unlearn. We will find the existence of the text, and of the translation, far stranger and far more unknowable than we would ever have thought.

4 CRITICAL EDITION

BUT EVEN I WEARY, IN THE END, of not knowing things. Everything I've said so far has relied so unremittingly on the other book's power to undo whatever we thought we knew about the book itself, or about reading, or about books in general, that I feel a bit relieved to be turning now to another book that is explicitly founded on the premise of the book's *knowability*: the richly annotated second volume of Queneau's complete works, published in 2002 as part of Gallimard's ambitious, elegant Bibliothèque de la Pléiade series. Nothing could be more different from a translation or a manuscript than this excellent critical edition, whose goal is, after all, to provide us with a trustworthy, authentic, definitive text of the novel—to present the book itself, and not some alternative version. A critical edition is closer to a copy, but the similarity is only partial: this isn't just any copy, after all. The *Chiendent* we find in the Pléiade edition is less *a Chiendent* than *the Chiendent*, not exactly superseding all other copies (clearly the book can still be read, studied, and cited in the Folio edition), but in a sense reducing their authority (a Pléiade is a sort of edition of record, an edition that must at least be consulted if one is to write seriously about the text in question, and often the default source for citations). A Pléiade edition gives us not simply the book, but the book *perfected*.

Curiously, this very quality separates the edition from the book itself. If this is the book perfected (or completed, or contextualized—pick the adjective that suits you), then it is not exactly *the book*, which comes to us *au naturel*, without prefaces, variants, or even guarantees of definitiveness. (To be fair, the Pléiade edition generally doesn't *guarantee* definitiveness, but that remains its aim: it corrects errors from previous editions, notes possible authorial slips, and so on.) Perhaps the clearest indication of the gap between a critical edition and the book itself can be found by considering how many of the theories and stances already discussed here the critical edition controverts. Eco warns that a good translation must not "say more" than the original, but this is precisely what a critical edition *must* do. Parker tells us that our critical faculties should be applied only to what's supposed to be in the book, but by introducing into our reading a wealth of material that the author never put there, the critical edition makes this task all but impossible. David Lewis claims that a story retold by another teller (even in precisely the same words) becomes a different story; by correcting and contextualizing the text, perhaps a critical edition does not so much give us access to the book itself as write an entirely new book. Todorov tells us that a text provides (or signifies) everything that is required for its understanding; the critical edition overtly operates on the opposite assumption. A critical edition thus creates the same kind of friction with the book itself as any copy, manuscript, or translation, and poses still more questions about our understanding of the book itself, this time linked to the thorny issue of knowledge. The critical edition would have us *know things* about the book, but as we have seen before, knowledge, certainty, and assurance have a way of slipping away when we allow the other book to speak.

Queneau himself would appear to have had a rather difficult relationship with knowledge. A spectacularly wide-ranging poly-

math (an "épistémophile," Anne Clancier calls him [167]), he devoted much of his life to the accumulation of knowledge, studying mathematics, history, languages, psychology, religions, art, and much more, with remarkable energy. At the same time, his essay "Richesse et limite" rails furiously against his society's very idea of knowledge, and particularly against the notion of knowledge as a thing to be acquired, hoarded, and measured, for when knowledge is simply an ever-growing pile of things known, it offers the opposite of a real understanding of the world. Only if we had some unifying principle by which to fit together all the facts we strive to acquire could we then build the foundations of a true *sagesse*. Indeed, another essay, "Les mathématiques dans la classification des sciences," would suggest that an apparent unifying principle may well not be one at all: "[W]hat do we know in mathematics? Precisely nothing. And there's nothing *to* know. We no more know the point, the number, the group, the set, the function than we know the electron, life, human behavior. . . . All that we know is a method considered (accepted) as true by the community of scientists," he writes (126). The system of mathematics allows us to understand the interactions of elements within the context and confines of that system as we ourselves have defined it, but it does not allow us to "know" what "number" actually *is*.

In both of those arguments we sense a yearning for some knowledge that lies beyond what we can immediately grasp from the world around us—a theme that plays no small role in *Le chiendent* itself. All the major characters, at one time or another, become convinced that there is more to the world than they can see. For most of them, this takes the banal form of a conviction that some great treasure lies hidden behind Taupe's blue door, a conviction arrived at by way of epistemological practices that are as common as they are potentially dubious: analogy (Mme Cloche assumes from the death of one secretly rich old man that Taupe too must

be secretly rich), interpretation (the blue door, so out of place on Taupe's wall, has to mean something), and imitation (others are after the blue door, so Narcense and Saturnin go after it as well). But it is Étienne who seems to feel most poignantly the existence of some deeper truth without which the simple reality of his world can only escape him. "[E]ven a cigarette butt hides its own truth," he tells Pierre Le Grand (123), a certainty accompanied by the anguish of not knowing that truth, nor how to find it, nor what the word "truth" might mean. Indeed, the sense of Étienne's very words (to pursue an argument I made in the previous chapter) is to some degree unknowable: does he mean that the cigarette butt contains within itself a hidden history (who smoked it, and when, and under what circumstances?), or that the butt is in some way not only a cigarette but also something else? It's difficult to know, too, how seriously we should take his pronouncement; surely not *everything* in the world has some hidden meaning, surely a cigarette butt is sometimes just a cigarette butt. But curiously, his idea is precisely the one that motivates this or any other critical edition, which, for its *raison d'être*, depends on the idea that there is something more to the book than the words we see before us, that the book is not exactly, or not simply, what it seems to be. "What would be interesting would be to say what that 'something else' is," remarks Le Grand in response to Étienne's claim that a pair of scissors is not simply a pair of scissors but also something else (104). "But it's not possible," responds Étienne—and yet a critical edition does set out to say precisely that. The book is also something else, the edition tells us, and then does its best to show us what that something else is.

Would knowing what else that cigarette butt is help Étienne to know it better? *Le chiendent* gives us no answers, of course. Does knowing what else the book is help us to know the book better? Well, what else *is* a book, apart from what it is? An answer immediately presents itself: a book is also its context.

KNOWING THE CONTEXT

But before it can begin to reveal the book's context, before the reader has even opened the cover, a Pléiade edition has already endowed the work with a *new* context. By the volume's discreetly luxurious outer form as by the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade's thoughtful selection process, a Pléiade book bespeaks exclusivity. The Pléiade doesn't publish just anyone, and is clearly not intended for just any reader. This is a serious author, a Pléiade volume tells us from the start, suitable for the sort of serious reader who would buy a book like this one. This in itself gives us a new Queneau (in this case), one who takes his place alongside Proust, Montaigne, Voltaire, and other monuments of French and world literature. To read Queneau in the Pléiade edition is necessarily to read him *as a monument*, worthy of the volume's elegant binding, fine paper, and scrupulous scholarly apparatus. It is, in other words, to read him as a different Queneau, as part of what T. S. Eliot calls the tradition, a figure in literature's vast tapestry. Given this, how can we read this particular *Chiendent* as we might have read it before, when it came to us only in the form of a modest, ephemeral paperback?

I don't mean to suggest that those other editions give us anything like an unmediated access to the book itself, of course, but only that the Pléiade edition does not and cannot do so. In part, this is precisely because it seeks to offer us a definitive text; it adds to the text the idea that this is a work deserving of such solicitude, and hence transforms it. Queneau surely would have been delighted to see his work taken so seriously, and he surely would have been thrilled to be so explicitly included in a literary tradition of this sort; if we are to believe his essays (see, for example, "Des génies méconnus"), he considered that kind of inclusion a writer's most laudable ambition. But inclusion in the Pléiade library *imposes* that status on a writer, and on his or her reader, and

so changes the nature of the book itself; we can no longer read the work as innocently as we might if we encountered it in paperback form. Perhaps, if we're reading Queneau in the Pléiade edition, we don't *want* to read the text that innocently; my point is simply that we *can't*, or at least not as easily.

This impossibility is enforced most authoritatively by the sumptuous critical apparatus with which the novels are surrounded. The apparatus is both extensive (the eight novels contained in this volume take up 1,231 pages, the critical apparatus 570, or a little less than half a page of apparatus for every page of text) and varied: a general preface, with footnotes; a chronology of Queneau's literary life from 1922 to 1942; a note on the constitution of this edition (reasons for including or excluding unpublished writings and non-novel narratives, the basis of the establishment of the text and of textual corrections, the nature of the unpublished material included, reasons for placing a given text in an appendix or among the variants, the structure of the appendices, the goal of the introduction to each text, the theory behind the notes to each text, the conventions to be respected throughout the apparatus, a bibliography of works by Queneau referred to in the apparatus); a set of appendices; and an assortment of notes and variants, themselves preceded by an introduction to *Le chiendent* itself, again with footnotes, and by a notice on the nature of the novel's manuscripts and *avant-textes*.

Forgive this long enumeration, which I indulge in simply to show the richness of this volume's apparatus, and its admirable insistence on revealing its own procedures and principles. The goal is clearly to give us the broadest, deepest understanding possible of the context of Queneau's work, but also to steer us clear of any *false* context, the dangers of which editor Henri Godard seems to be painfully aware. Early in his general introduction, he writes that Queneau's reputation as an amusing, fanciful—and perhaps

not particularly profound—writer derives from three well-known works: *Exercices de style*, "Si tu t'imagines," and *Zazie dans le métro*. Through these three texts, his name became known "beyond the limited circle of his first readers, and this less by way of his books themselves than by their transformation into a show, a song, or a film, which did not fail to bring with it a certain supplementary simplification of the image of the author" (xi). A text can well give us the wrong impression about its author, and hence about itself, when it is placed in the wrong (in these cases, reductive) context; given this, it is of course incumbent on an editor not to deform the text in that same way, to allow it to be the book itself, to say what it is supposed to say and nothing more. Godard is insistent on this point: the role of the edition is not to shape or determine our reading of Queneau's book. Hence the instructions given to the volume's sub-editors concerning their introductions to the individual works:

It was . . . agreed, in the first place, that every attempt would be made to distinguish facts from interpretation, insofar as possible: consequently, the reader will find in the first part of each preface a study of the genesis of the work, its links to the author's experiences, to the history of the time, or to intertextual phenomena. In the subsequent section, devoted to interpretation, the guiding principle was to summarize—avoiding all polemic—the different interpretations that have been put forward, before the author finally arrives at a statement of his or her preferences, or a presentation of his or her own. (lxxi)

There's no faulting Godard's deontology, of course; neutrality must surely be the aim of any critical edition, and these lines make his allegiance to that ideal entirely clear. At the same time, a palpable tension seems to underlie Godard's words, for they tell us that

while the critical edition exists to place the novel in its proper context, context is a nonetheless a thing to be approached with great caution. After all, the wrong *kind* of context (interpretations rather than facts, for instance) might—well, what might it do, exactly? Simply waste the reader's time? My impression is that for Godard the danger is greater than that, closer to the kind of deformation alluded to earlier, to something that would make the text *another* text, changing its very being in the eyes of the reader. This fear of changing the novel is made particularly clear by the word "polemic," which, as Godard's introduction goes on to demonstrate, is a kind of code word, with a very specific referent: the much-disputed question of the influence of philosopher René Guénon on Queneau's writing. As Godard remarks, the gradual revelation of the full extent of Queneau's fascination with Guénon's ideas (a revelation that began with the publication of Queneau's wartime diaries in 1986) has given rise to a lively debate among scholars; particularly in the early days of that debate, the controversy divided Queneau's critics into two camps which, if not in the end all that sharply divergent, nonetheless saw each other's approach as reductive and incomplete (the very model of Fish's interpretive communities). It is above all any fundamentalist propaganda concerning this controversy that Godard wishes to keep out of his edition: "It is not the role of an edition such as this to choose between opposing theses, and even less to take sides concerning the question of beliefs or lack of beliefs" (lxx–lxxi).

The edition must do no more than "teach the controversy," as they say, for to do otherwise, Godard suggests, would be to change the book. The Guénonian, "esoteric" interpretation of *Le chiendent*, he writes, "integrates the totality of the novel, as much on the level of its global structure as on that of sometimes quite minor details. It speaks to an audience of readers who have a knowledge of those doctrines, and sympathy for them. For such readers, it

brings about in *Le chiendent* a different work from that read by the others" (1462). Again, as with his evocation of film or song adaptations of Queneau's work, Godard returns to the idea that the text can be changed by its placement within a given context. And of course he does not want to change the text; he wants us to see it exactly as it is. Clearly, he does not view the Guénonian reading as offering that access, for in such an approach "esoteric references, even those of an apparently jocose sort, are taken to be the very heart of the work's signification . . . like so many signs or signals that must orient us toward the one true interpretation" (lvii–xlviii), and the search for these clues "inevitably leaves a great deal up to the subjectivity of the critic, depending on the degree of his receptivity to those doctrines" (lxx).

Godard thus seeks to give us the book itself, with an apparatus founded in fact, not interpretation, and one that will not deform our reading of the book, which is, if we are to take his words literally, the same thing as rewriting the text ("a different work"). He dismisses the esoteric approach because it allows the book only one context, and Queneau's work is too vast to be thus limited: "Whatever the background against which the book can be seen, the book contains a meaning sufficient to itself, and which can, by itself, offer the reader the pleasure that is its own alone" (xlviii). But there is an odd ambiguity in this sentence. If the text can always produce its effects no matter what horizon it's placed against, is this to say that any context is essentially the right one, since the horizon against which we view the text doesn't matter (it can have no effect), or that certain contexts are *wrong* because they're at odds with the pleasure that is unavoidably *in* the text, even if in the end they can do nothing to harm it? The first reading more accurately reflects the sense of the sentence's words, but the second fits more with the argument that Godard has been making (that the wrong context limits a text), even if it implies that even

a wrong context cannot really harm the text. How to explain this ambiguity? Perhaps Godard has a theoretical belief in the power of the text to overcome a damaging or limiting context, but in practice, this certainty notwithstanding, he has his doubts—and in this I would wholeheartedly agree with him.

In any case, Godard takes very seriously the obligation to provide the work with a non-limiting context. Certainly, his own introduction to the volume seeks to provide the most catholic sort of horizon for Queneau's novels, laying out by turns the role of humor and games in his writing (x), his importance as a theorist of the novel and as a creator of lucidly structured texts (xvii), his fascination with language (xxii), his interest in the real world around him (xxv), the autobiographical aspect of his work (xxviii), his interest in psychoanalysis (xxxi), the existential questions he poses (xxxiii), the "anthropological" nature of his narrative (xxxix), his preoccupation with philosophy (xlii) and with religion, gnosis, and esotericism (xlv), the place he assigns to love and desire (xlix), the influence of surrealism (li), his struggle with the destructive force of time (liii), the idea of "sagesse" or wisdom (lv), and his play with the conventions of the novel (lvii). Here, then, we have a list of things to be seen in Queneau's novels; it is to my mind a perfectly complete and accurate list—but for all its laudable intentions, it still tells us what we will find in Queneau's books, and so still shapes our experience. Wrapped in this context, fitted with a road map, the novel takes on a form distinct from the novel itself, even if the things said about it are entirely true. To read Queneau's work in the context of these qualities is to read the work as it really is, this list implies, and to do otherwise is to read *another* work, just as the esoteric approach creates a different work. Again, the preface could not have done otherwise: no matter what an introductory essay like this says about a body of work, it will necessarily alter and shape—and even limit—our reading. As

Fish would surely argue, an edition like this can *never* be neutral, can never simply give us the book, and can never allow us to read that book simply as that book, because context always shapes interpretation. It can never give us access, that is, to the book itself, despite or because of the care with which it seeks to give us that book in its most meaningful form (but again, the same is true of any other form of the book).

The edition's transformative effect exerts itself in more specific ways as well. Godard explicitly aligns the silhouette's transformation into Étienne Marcel with the experience of a reader of novels, who sees what is at first a flat, indistinct figure grow into a full-fledged, complicated, "three-dimensional" person. Queneau takes this metaphor "literally" in his depiction of the development of Étienne Marcel, says Godard (xix), to which I answer: maybe, maybe not. This is one—but only one—way to interpret that change (Étienne himself, in the novel, attributes it to his own sudden awareness of the strangeness of the world around him, and thus his accession to thought). Godard's is a fine reading, and one widespread among Queneau's critics, but to place it in the introduction to an edition such as this is to give the reader the impression that it is the one true interpretation (which is precisely what Godard condemns in the esoteric interpretation), just as his interpretation of the novel's title ("What can couch-grass [*le chiendent*] represent in the novel, if not the perpetual rebirth of evil?" [xxxvi]) limits it to one of its meanings, rendering any other reading of it dubious and even wrong: if we don't see it that way, as what, Godard's words suggest, it *must* be, we are surely once again reading a different book. Too, the edition's emphasis on the capital importance of Queneau's trip to Greece (the volume includes a chronology laying out a full itinerary of that four-month voyage [lx], while the introduction to *Le chiendent* tells us which chapters were written in which locales and between which dates

[1445]) does nothing more than echo Queneau's own idea of the fundamental nature of that experience—but to have this insistence *attached to* the novel is to make it part of the novel, and so to make the novel different from the one we read in any other edition. The Pléiade volume's insistence on the inaugural aspect of *Le chiendent* (all the essential elements of Queneau's games with language are "already in *Le chiendent*" [1465], and the humor is "already perfectly Quenellian," deriving, "as will always be the case," from a rich variety of sources [1441]), while absolutely accurate, nonetheless *makes* this novel the inauguration of Queneau's work—which, I insist, is not exactly what *Le chiendent* is in paperback form (for instance), where this aspect of the text is not attached to it. The edition forces *Le chiendent* to be something that it absolutely is but that, in any other form, it need not necessarily be; once again, the edition is a different book, not the book itself. But let me repeat, the fault is not with Godard or with his ideas. There *is* no fault, for any other introduction would have had exactly the same effect. This is simply the nature of the critical edition: precisely because it seeks to give us the truest experience of the work, it shapes that experience, and shaping, as Godard himself suggests, is at least potentially indistinguishable from deforming.

Even simply describing the reader's experience means describing what the reader's experience *should be*, and in a sense forbidding any other sort of experience (something which, once again, the book itself does not do). Thus, speaking of the workings of the "traditional" novel, Godard rightly asserts that it seeks to let us forget we are reading a novel, to let us experience the story as if it were real. Not so its modern counterpart: "An insistent disengagement from that imperative of illusion will be, in the twentieth century, one of the constant principles of novelistic modernity" (xvii). And it is of course in these terms that he sees Queneau's writing: "[F]rom the first word, he strives to prevent the reader

from falling into the trap of illusion. Far from seeking to make that illusion as full as possible, he does all he can to hinder it" (xix). To be sure, Godard does not entirely reject the existence of novelistic illusion in Queneau's writing, among whose delights, he tells us, are "the pleasure of never losing sight of the fact that we are reading literature, and that of believing, at times, in the characters, enjoying at the same moment a friendship with them and a complicity with the novelist" (lviii). This double-edged sort of reading is one that Godard privileges in his introduction to *Le chiendent*, citing the balance in that novel "between amusement and seriousness, between the roles ascribed respectively to novelistic illusion and to the destruction of that illusion, in short between the different levels of reading that the text calls for simultaneously" (1441). Indeed, as he writes a little further on, "Queneau works so visibly to prevent the production of a novelistic mimetic effect in the reader's mind that we can only be surprised, when we look more closely, to discover with what care he has simultaneously brought together all the customary conditions used to create that effect" (1454). Again, then, he praises the balance between "that novelistic construction, in principle intended to produce an illusion in the reader's mind, and the formal constructions whose effect is to rip the reader away from that illusion" (1455).

Godard's language is strikingly insistent: we *never* lose sight of the fact that we're reading literature, the text *calls for* a certain kind of reading, the novel only *intends* (and only in principle) to create an illusion, but its *effect*, apparently real and inevitable, is to rip us away from that illusion. But is this an objective description of the novel or a prescription for a certain kind of reading, and thus the creation of a certain novel? I agree that there are two aspects to the great pleasure of reading Queneau, one involving the story and the other the ironic distance of the narration, but in my experience these two pleasures are in no way distinct. Godard

tells us that Queneau's narrative practice "imparts to the reading an oscillation between the interest we feel in the characters and their story, and the perception of that intentional construction" (1454), but in my reading I feel no such oscillation; although I am quite aware of *Le chiendent*'s formal construction, the fact is that I pay it no particular mind as I am reading—or rather, perhaps, the formal aspect is as much a part of the illusion for me as the mimetic aspect. The story creates a reality in my mind (and, notwithstanding the entire history of the twentieth-century novel, I feel no shame about this), but so does the formal construction (the novel's rhymes and rhythms create a reality and a way of perceiving the story's reality that is to me as illusorily palpable, as real, as the illusorily palpable and real reality constructed by the mimetic aspect). I see no difference between the two; at most, I would say that it is the formal structure that allows the mimetic reality of this novel to exist as forcefully as it does. The two aspects, if there *are* two aspects, do not counterbalance each other, but reinforce each other.

Am I wrong? Godard's formulations would suggest that I am. I have never felt myself being "ripped away" from the illusion, and I don't recall ever seeing that illusion "destroyed." (I am so fond of this book not because it destroys an illusion but because its illusion is so much richer, so much more complicated, so much more powerful than the illusions of many other books.) Or so at least it occurs to me now, now that Godard's remark has forced me to consider that question. It is surely a good thing to be forced to consider such questions; that's an important virtue of Godard's edition, and of critical editions generally, which must surely exert that sort of effect on a regular basis (after all, do not the footnotes and so on *necessarily* rip the reader away from the unbroken pleasure of the illusion constructed by the story?). But this is precisely what I've been trying to say about this particular edition: although

it strives for objectivity and neutrality, it necessarily takes certain stands ("necessarily" because one can't speak of a novel without limiting it, without determining the ways in which it will be allowed to signify), and so directs the reader's experience in a way that the book itself does not. We could go further: the critical edition necessarily places the reader in a position of *inferiority* to the text, for it must tell us that we don't really know the book we thought we knew, or, if we have no knowledge of the book at all, that there is more to be known about it than we could discover on our own simply by reading it. And with this it imposes a responsibility on us, obliging us to *care* about the material included in the apparatus and the contextualization offered in the introduction. We must read all that, we must understand it, or try to, or pretend to. If not, we are not good readers, or not as good as those who do care about such things (not Model Readers, as Eco would have it—but aren't Model Readers supposed to be unfussy and not overly curious?).

And then, having understood it, we must do something with it. I don't think I'm imagining that obligation. As Genette writes of the biographical context of Proust's work (that is, his homosexuality), "I am not saying that it has to be known; I am only saying that those who do know it do not read like those who do not" (*Seuils* 13); a bit further on, speaking of an author's concept of the sense of his or her own work, he tells us that "the critic is in no way required to subscribe to it; I only insist that, knowing it, he cannot entirely neglect it" (375). We thus do not have to know the context, but if we do know it, we have to do something with it; we don't have to agree with it (although this is to some degree contradicted by Genette's claim that a certain revelation from the *avant-textes* of Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme* "is decisive, no matter how criticism might try to deny it" [368]), but in any case we have to acknowledge it. And it is precisely this sort of context that

the critical edition confronts us with; having it before us, we must take it into account, and so, as Genette says, read the book differently (we can no longer read it like those who do not know it). The effect of that context is neither a good nor a bad thing, but it is inevitable. The book itself leaves us alone; we can do as we wish with it, even fail to understand it, but the critical edition does not and cannot allow us that liberty.

If we want a metaphorical image of the kind of constraint a critical edition imposes on a book and its readers, we need only consider the (perfectly reasonable and conventional) layout of this volume: first an introduction, then the novels, then the notes and variants. Hemmed in on all sides, the novels are reduced, if that's the right word, to their existence within a certain context. But the novels are not only surrounded by that context; they're also infiltrated by it, through the numbers and letters referring the reader to the notes and variants. Those references are put into the text, but in a curiously ambivalent way, meant to be seen but also not to be seen. The message of those little superscripts is clear: the other story is here, if you want it. They do not explicitly tell us that we *should* want it, and yet there they are, reminding us (but so discreetly) of their presence. There is a strange and meaningful paradox here: everything about the layout of the critical edition tells us that context is vital, and yet it seems to want to separate that context from the novel even as it enfolds the novel in it. I call this paradox meaningful because it reflects yet again the two natures of the book. The edition recognizes the book's closedness (hence the caution with which it approaches context, the need to attenuate the visibility of that context, and to separate it from the text) precisely as much as its openness (its availability to contextualization, its receptivity to notes, variants, and other additions). The critical edition knows it is an other book, and plays that role

without hesitation while at the same time seeking not to play it. Context is one way in which this happens; allusions are another, far more troubling way.

KNOWING THE REFERENCES

Godard's introduction to *Le chiendent* spells out quite clearly the importance of spotting Queneau's many references. When he writes that "No reader of Plato can help thinking of the *Phaedo*" on reading Ernestine's deathbed speech (1460), or that Mme Cloche's various personal attributes, "for the reader of Joyce's *Ulysses*, make of her . . . a counterpart to the midwife whom Stephen Dedalus sees strolling on Sandymount beach" (1464), he seems to be saying that non-readers of Plato or Joyce (not to mention readers of Plato or Joyce who don't make the connections he makes) are experiencing a poorer reading than the others, one from which something is missing. For alert readers of Plato or Joyce, Godard's language suggests, the spotting of the allusion is automatic, inevitable. It's *part of* their reading, and ideally should be an automatic part of any reading, for these allusions are indisputably there. Similarly, when he says that mathematics is visible in the text only in the allusion to Georg Cantor, "for the very small number of readers able to understand it" (1458), he is suggesting that this very small number of readers has a richer, more complete experience, which is to say one closer to Queneau's. Or at least closer to how the novel wants to be read, for as he writes a little further on, *Le chiendent* displays an intertextuality that is, "for the reader, an invitation to play. That reader is meant to spot and to identify the allusions, or to make the connections suggested by the text, in accordance with his own level of competence"; thus, the reader will find in *Le chiendent* "a scattering of minor references, which, for the author—and, he hopes, for the reader—are rooted in our shared cultural knowledge, and have long been the baggage of anyone who has passed his

baccalaureate exam" (1464). Again, the language of these remarks is striking: each of us, according to his or her ability, is expected to discover the allusions included in the novel, and to refuse the author's invitation is to exclude oneself from a game that is, after all, a part of the experience of the text. To lack the competence to play that game is to be excluded *from* it; but in any case those who play the game better than others will have a better time than the rest, and a richer experience, closer to the experience Queneau wants to give us. You don't have to know it, but if you do you must use it, said Genette; here the implication is that you really should know it. For, Godard suggests, *any* reader really should be able to play this game, unless he or she is lacking a perfectly common sort of knowledge. Those who never took the baccalaureate—or who did, but have since forgotten their classics, or slipped through without really reading them—can only feel that their reading will be a deficient one, particularly given that they do not conform to the model that the author *hopes* his reader will incarnate.

The question of that reader's deficiency is a delicate and uncomfortable one, so delicate that even the usually intrepid Stanley Fish balks when he runs up against it. Considering a question posed by Wayne Booth—can a Catholic or an atheist enjoy *Paradise Lost* to the same degree as a Protestant of Milton's day?—Fish writes, "The answer, it seems to me, is no. There are some beliefs that cannot be momentarily suspended or assumed." The logical question to ask at this point is whether those latter readers are reading *as well as* the former. Intriguingly, Fish doesn't ask it, but instead immediately wonders, "Does this mean then that *Paradise Lost* is a lesser work because it requires a narrowly defined (that is, 'fit') reader?" It does not, he answers, assuring us that his method "allows for . . . no such fixings of value" (50), perhaps unaware that the words "requires" and "fit" (the latter in quotation marks, as if he were reluctant to say outright what he is in fact saying) have

a great deal to do with the fixing of value, with respect not to the text but to the quality of its non-Protestant reader's reading. Neither Fish nor Godard will come out and say it, but both discreetly suggest that a reader's understanding is *marred* by a failure to know what the author knows, that such readers can only be reading a "different book," and that this matters.

As always, I do not in any way mean to criticize Godard's thinking. I don't believe there is any other argument he could have made, or any other way he could have expressed it. If an author makes allusions, we have to assume that the reader's experience of the text will be influenced by his or her recognition or non-recognition of those allusions. Readers who do not recognize them will surely see a different text from the one seen by those who do, as surely as the esoteric reader sees a different work from the other kind. (I don't think this is an unfair parallel, as I can't see why that notion of "a different work" should refer *only* to the esoteric reading.) And alas, where allusions are concerned at least, different is arguably not simply different, but less good. The allusions thus have to be explained. No doubt this does alter the reader's experience in some way, but simply leaving out any mention of those allusions in this edition would not work either. Such a tactic would merely ensure that some readers fail to see references that are, after all, there (if they are), and would hence deform their experience of the book in its own way. No matter how the question of allusions is approached, something unpleasant happens.

For Godard, in any case, there is no doubt: certain allusions must be seen, even if it's difficult to know just how much has to be explicitly pointed out: "With texts like Queneau's the information that must be supplied poses questions of its own, given the diversity of his readers, the number who are not native speakers of French, and the need to illuminate certain allusions that might very likely pass by unnoticed. . . . To be on the safe side [pour plus

de sûreté], a note has been devoted to allusions or literary quotations whenever their references stood outside the most general sort of common knowledge" (lxxi). "To be on the safe side": there is thus a danger lurking in these allusions, namely, that a reader may fail to see them, because the *real* book is the one in which all the necessary allusions are understood. Absent that, the book cannot be *entirely* itself. Hence, of course, the need for endnotes.

The endnotes thus give us a fascinating glimpse of an answer to a truly impossible question—what must a reader know in order to understand *Le chiendent*?—but they also pose a question that I find far more interesting: why is it so very difficult to set out what a reader needs to know? Why, even as the edition offers that knowledge to the reader, does the knowledge in question seem to refuse all attempts to control and categorize it? By my count (my guiding principle being that a literary allusion is one that does not explicitly name its referent, that requires the reader to recognize something already [potentially] read elsewhere), the notes identify thirty-six allusions that must be understood for a full appreciation of *Le chiendent*. This number itself offers an example of the difficulty of defining the knowledge required of the reader, for there are allusions mentioned in the introduction that do not appear in the notes (Descartes, Plato, certain references to Joyce and Proust): does this mean that they are less important (not deserving of a note) or more important (too important to be relegated to a note)? Surely, at least in the case of the novel's allusions to the *Phaedo* or the *Parmenides*, it's not because they belong to the "most general sort of common knowledge" evoked in the volume's preface that they don't appear in the notes. Perhaps Godard simply wants to avoid repeating himself? But he does so elsewhere: the introduction to *Le chiendent* mentions allusions to Villon, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud and, in a note to that passage, refers us to the notes to the text itself in which these allusions will

be identified (see page 1465, notes 3 and 4). We must assume, then, that the allusions to Descartes and Plato, and certain of the allusions to Joyce and Proust, exist, in some sense, on a different level from the others. It would be difficult to define this difference of status, to know whether allusions named in the introduction are by implication more or less crucial than those explained in the notes, but the distinction strongly suggests that there is some sort of difference between the two—or perhaps the distinction *creates* such a difference, telling us that, although there are certain things one needs to know to fully understand the novel, those things are not all equal.

The thirty-six allusion-identifying notes that I have counted constitute a bit less than one-third of the 115 notes total (one can thereby calculate for oneself the percentage of allusion-based knowledge within the sum of all the things one must know to understand this text—and the ratio thereby obtained seems to me entirely right). Seven of those notes explain allusions to popular culture (songs, a well-known mnemonic device, the cinema, a comic drawing); the remainder are overtly literary in nature, four of them referring to Joyce, four to Gide, three to Proust, two to the Bible, and one each for a broad range of authors from Juvenal to Breton, by way of Villon, Molière, Rousseau, Rimbaud, and others. These rankings are not without interest, but once again the most fascinating revelation to be found from a reading of those thirty-six notes involves a kind of uncertainty concerning the status of the information they contain. While a large majority name the allusion as an incontrovertible fact (one passage is "a winking nod in the direction of surrealism" [1469 n. 12], another "inevitably recalls Rabelais" [1481 n. 19], of a third Godard writes that "We cannot read this last phrase without thinking of . . . *The Gold Rush*" [1476 n. 3]), eight of them posit that link in the mode of the merely possible, by way of formulas like "is not unlikely

to remind us" (1469 n. 4), "There is every chance that" (1474 n. 6), "A possible echo" (1469 n. 10), and "more or less explicit allusions" (1480 n. 4). This is in itself fairly curious: if these notes are meant to offer the reader what it is necessary to know in order to understand Queneau's novel (and if they are meant to exclude "interpretation and commentary" [lxxi]), such hypothetical formulations seem somewhat out of place. And there is another odd fact to be glimpsed in those eight less-than-certain endnotes. Three of them refer to *Ulysses*, a text that we *know* to have been of capital importance to Queneau in his conception of *Le chiendent* (he tells us so in "Technique du roman" [28]), and whose intertextual use Godard indicates without ambiguity in his introduction; also present in those eight are Gide, Céline, and Proust, all of whom Queneau at some point cites as influences on this novel. Only two putative allusions, to Rimbaud and to Franz Lehár, refer to creators whom Queneau did not at one time or another explicitly evoke as forerunners, kindred spirits, or competitors. Thus, what Queneau *tells* us influences the novel is often referred to in the notes as a mere possibility, and what he does not cite as significant is most often referred to as a certainty. I don't know quite what to make of this little paradox, except to see it as evidence of the resistance of knowledge to the kind of certain categorization that an edition such as this one does, after all, seek to give us. The very notion of the notes is that there are certain things we really do need to know, but no sooner is that goal explicitly stated—as it is in Godard's general introduction—than the edition backpedals away from it, implicitly giving that knowledge four different statuses depending on where it is provided and whether or not it is listed as certain. The whole idea of the edition is certainty, and the whole idea of defining the allusion is knowledge; both are promised, and neither is (nor, I think, can be) delivered.

This is particularly true in that certain of the notes seem to

blur the line between what we need to know and what we don't. Consider, for instance, the scene in which Mme Cloche first tries to convince Ernestine that she could become rich if she married Taupe: "Every day, Ernestine, you can go and hear your favorite operettas at the Trianon-Lyrique!" (90). The note attached to this sentence reads as follows: "The Trianon-Lyrique, located at au 80, Boulevard Rochechouart à Paris, was still an operetta theater in 1932. From 1939 to somewhere around 1970, it housed a movie theater" (1472 n. 6). I confess that I have never, on encountering this passage, wondered whether the Trianon-Lyrique was a real venue; I have always assumed that I understood what kind of place it must be (a place where one can hear operettas), and that this was all that had to be known—or even all there was to know—about it. The note insinuates that this is a faulty reading, or at least not as complete a reading as I might perform when armed with this information. Think back to our discussion of the reader's role of filling in information. What this note suggests is that, in this case at least, my own filling in ("The Trianon-Lyrique is a place where one can hear operettas") is best seen as a *pis aller*: if there is factual information that can spare me from having to fill in information on my own, then it should be provided, even if that information is essentially irrelevant to the text (or is it not irrelevant? am I missing something?). Think back, too, to our discussion of what is in the text: presumably the existence of the note suggests that the real existence of the Trianon-Lyrique is a thing that is genuinely in the text (to use Currie's formulation, the teller believes in the real existence of the real Trianon-Lyrique, so it really exists in the text), but also that we have no way of knowing that it is in the text, and that it is important that we *do* know it. But really, is it necessary to understand the substance of this note? What does it add? Perhaps nothing, but at the same time, if this is a thing that Queneau understood to be true, and that we readers *can* understand

to be true, is it not better to do so? And if it could be understood spontaneously, without the note, surely that would be better still. But does this mean that my own naive reading is, to whatever infinitesimal degree, insufficient, even if the information given in this endnote in no way influences the sense of the novel (or does it)? And that my next reading of the novel, assuming I remember the contents of this note, will be better than my last one? If it does mean that, I can see no way to avoid concluding that a reading of this novel in any format other than this edition is a defective one. And if it doesn't mean that, I don't see why this endnote should be included at all.

But if the edition's job is to allow us to know what Queneau or his readers would have known in 1933, then I find it difficult to understand the first note in part 3, which comments on Pierre Le Grand's scrutiny of the Comptoir des Comptes. As Godard tells us, the building in question still exists, though the decorative figures of its facade are not exactly as Queneau describes them. Godard suggests that Queneau has melded the real building's figures with the image depicted on "a famous poster from between the two wars showing a 'firm-breasted Negress,' which, first designed to promote the products of the colonies, was finally used as an army recruitment poster. It was this poster that would provide the title of Alexandre Vialatte's novel *Les fruits du Congo* in 1951" (1472 n. 1). As with the note on the Trianon-Lyrique, I don't necessarily see that this changes anything in my reading; for me, the Comptoir des Comptes has always been visualizable just as Queneau describes it ("the book contains a meaning sufficient to itself," as Godard says [xlviij]), and this new bit of information alters neither my vision of that building nor my sense of the reasons for its presence in the novel. The inclusion of the footnote suggests that there is a reason for Queneau's transformation of that building and that image, but again backs away from saying so. More im-

portantly, this note does not exactly bring us closer to the novel as experienced by its author: the reference to the Vialatte novel has no bearing on Queneau's intentions in 1933. It's as if a certain bit of knowledge related to the text had become, by way of its inclusion in a footnote, a part of the text, an almost necessary element of its understanding, and had then begun to spiral away from the text itself, into a time and a context having no relation to the novel. Godard is too canny an editor to let the note spiral very far, but the note nevertheless seems to *want* to, as indeed does the note on the Trianon-Lyrique, telling us what Queneau was thinking of in 1933 and then pursuing the existence of that physical entity into the future. If the point is providing knowledge—solid, certain, useful—of what is in the text, then why this drift?

Knowledge, it would seem, is required in order to understand a text, but begins to mutate as soon as we begin to enumerate it. Allusions slide from certainty to suggestion, the thing that must be known blurs with the thing that simply *can* be known, and so on. We've seen this kind of blurring before, of course: it's precisely what happens when we begin to take the manuscript seriously, and it's precisely what happens when a novel is translated, or even when we begin to look at the copy as a copy rather than a direct access to the book itself. In the first case we have a barrage of theories striving to keep the events of the text from blurring; in the second, we have the powerful commonplace that sees this blurring as infidelity, and as a thing to be condemned and avoided; in the third, we have our own reading practices, which focus on the book at hand as if it really were the book. But no one flinches when a critical edition pushes knowledge and context *beyond* the text itself. What exactly is the difference? Does the note concerning the poster not add an episode to *Le chiendent* (Queneau creating that description)? Why should that addition not bother us, if the attempt to incorporate a manuscript fragment into a text does?

This adding on to the text (an act, I repeat, almost invariably criticized by all the theorists we've considered so far) seems an unavoidable consequence of allusion-explaining endnotes. Consider, for example, Étienne Marcel's dream at the end of chapter 1: he meets two childhood friends, suddenly discovers that all three of them are nude, and takes them to the Bal des Quatz'Arts. "His right leg relaxes slightly," the narration then tells us (30), whereupon we find the following note: "In the first pages of *Du côté de chez Swann*, Proust spoke, in the context of an erotic dream, of a woman 'born in [his] sleep of an awkward position of [his] thigh'" (1469–70 n. 15). I find in this note no echo of my personal experience: I have never thought of Proust on reading Étienne's dream. Nor am I entirely certain that Godard believes I should, for the passage he cites is offered without comment, leading me to wonder if I should—or must—see this as an allusion, and leading me to wonder, too, if I should or must see Étienne's dream as an erotic one. It's never struck me that way, but I suppose it's not out of the question. Is Étienne a repressed homosexual, since both of these friends are male? If so, then that has now become part of the text. Or are there women present at the Bal des Quatz'Arts? Perhaps, but they're not mentioned in the text—or should we now add women to the mix? Think back to Champigny and so many of the other ontologists and reader-response critics we read in chapter 2: such additions to the text seem precisely the sort of thing they warn us against. Hence, perhaps, Godard's reluctance to divulge the sense, if any, of this putative allusion to Proust; or else, given the apparent ease with which figures or motivations can be added to the text, hence those critics' dogged attempts to prevent it.

Less overt, but no less real in the potential change it makes to the text, is a note appended to a line (already discussed in the last chapter) delivered by Narcense on first meeting Pierre Le Grand in Hippolyte's café in Obonne: "I'd like this café and that dusty

Mazda light bulb and that dog dreaming on the marble and this very night—to be eternal" (18). "This 'Mazda light bulb' is a winking nod in the direction of surrealism, and more particularly at *Nadja*," says the note (1469 n. 12), before citing the relevant passage from Breton's book. Here the note *does* mirror my own experience as a reader. I too more or less automatically think of *Nadja* on encountering this line, and yet when I see the allusion stated with such certainty I find myself resisting: who *says* this is a winking allusion to *Nadja*? One of the pleasures of the book itself, it seems to me, is that we can't quite know if an allusion like this is meant to be one or not; to name it as one makes of a teasing possibility a certainty, and thereby strips it of its fun (and perhaps a part of its meaning). But Godard would not have done better by saying "This is not an allusion to *Nadja*," of course, or even "This may or may not be an allusion to *Nadja*," for, as we saw in the discussion of the planet Pluto in the Sherlock Holmes stories, each of these formulations *adds* something to the text (even the third, for surely one of the possible features of this potential allusion is that the reader might not spot it at all). Again, as soon as some manner of knowledge of the text is posited (even an expressed knowledge of our ignorance), the text is reduced or deformed; it might almost seem that the only way to let the text be itself, knowable as itself—which is, after all, what Godard, to his unmitigated credit, wants—is to say nothing about it at all.

I'm a little ashamed of myself for having written those last few words, and yet I find myself thinking that even a note that explains something that is indisputably "there" in the text does something to the text, and prevents it from being entirely itself. I'm thinking, for instance, of a note appended to the meeting of Narcense and Bébé Toutout in chapter 2, in which the latter informs the former: "One day I'm going to do you over good, you'll see, do you over in the kind of way that destroys you for all your life" (37). The

note reads: "Bébé Toutout will do more than destroy Narcense 'for all his life': by denouncing him as a deserter, an act alluded to on page 235, he will cause him to be executed" (1470 n. 4). This is not the only note that alerts the reader to an allusion in the text to the text itself; another seeks to ensure our understanding of the transformation of Miss Aulini into Missize Aulini (the first appearance of the latter name leads to the endnote "And no longer 'Miss Aulini' as on page 223" [1481 n. 23]), while a third makes clear that Cloche's mention of "A guy flattened by the B" (33) refers to the death of Potice ("On page 21, the reader learned, without further detail, that Potice had been 'laminated by a bus'" [1470 n. 1]).

Such notes create a strange, twofold effect. On the one hand, they suggest an insistence on the reader's understanding of the text; on the other, they refuse to let these echoes be seen as I believe the text wants them to be seen—that is, as semi-visible, fleeting connections *that we might well miss* (for the possibility of missing them is, I think, as vital a part of the reader's experience as the possibility of seeing them). Godard seems to see the potential failure to understand the text as a predictable part of the reader's experience, and no doubt he's right, but if that potential really is *part* of the experience—if our possible failure to see is a necessary element of our reading—then the notes perhaps destroy at least as much as they preserve. To use Eco's phrase, the note makes the text "say more" than it does. If not—if the notes simply make clearer what isn't sufficiently clear in the text—then we must assume that there is something wrong with the text. Again, it would seem that the simple act of speaking of these things can only damage some aspect of the book itself, but of course saying nothing is no better: if these things really are in the text, if the text can't be itself without them, then to leave them out is potentially to impose on the reader a book that isn't really the book.

This is the great difficulty with textual allusions: if we don't see them, the text is reduced, but if they're pointed out, they no longer work as they're supposed to. Godard senses this, I think; his hopeful evocation of the reader's level of culture and his statement of the reader's responsibility to accept Queneau's invitation to play suggests a sort of longing for a reader able to see these external and internal allusions without being prompted, a sort of implicit understanding that a note always carries within it a certain undoing of the text itself. This may seem an odd idea in the context of a critical edition, but it's a commonplace among translators. Raffel calls translators' notes "interruptions of the syntactic flow" (36); Eco considers them "always a sign of weakness on the part of a translator" (50), while Chaudhuri writes that "the distancing effect of such a practice militates against the literal comprehension it affords" (29). It is the translator's job to reproduce the text without interruptions, without explicit mediation. I don't think it too incongruous to evoke that stance here, for even if the critical editor's job is to append notes like these to the text, to explain what may not be clear, the note's effect is in the end no different from that of a note in a translation: it's the sign of a failing (on the translator's part in one case, on the part of the text or the reader in the other), and hence quietly insists that the text itself, in ideal circumstances, should be able to exist unbroken and inviolate. To this extent, we might say that behind every explanation of allusions in a critical edition lies a kind of regret, a sense that in an ideal world made up of ideal readers none of this would have to be explained, a longing for the book itself, and a resigned recognition that the text alone cannot really offer it. Behind the opening of the text to a broad range of readers must lie a sense of the text's essential closure, its required knowledge, the role it imposes on the reader. And there is another way in which the critical edition's

attempt to open the text reveals above all an odd closedness: the edition's interest in the text's textuality, its history, its previous incarnations, its variants.

KNOWING THE TEXT'S HISTORY

Variants are a critical edition's lifeblood, and understandably so; if the goal is to provide the fullest possible view of the work, then prior versions must be included in some way. What intrigues me, though, is how strangely uncertain and self-defeating that inclusion turns out to be. The edition displays the variants as a sort of guarantee of completeness, but at the same time it hides them away—almost encodes them—as if to keep them from interfering with the text itself, as if to ensure that they *can* be ignored. Thus, in a strikingly literal illustration of the idea of the Derridean supplement, the edition tells us that the definitive text is complete in and of itself, but also that it is not *really* complete without these variants (and we can distinguish this from the volume's treatment of allusions, which are simply presented as *necessary* for the reader to see). This stance confers a highly ambiguous status on both the text and the variants. The text is primary and definitive, but finds the fullest expression of its existence only in the presence of what has been deemed external to it; the variants are deemed significant enough for inclusion, and yet walled off from the text, a part of the book but not a part of it. The critical edition thus strives to separate everything that is the work from everything that is not, while at the same time including everything that is not the work in the work—or at least just outside of it, on its margins, half in, half out, in a shadowy zone whose exact nature is deeply and even troublingly uncertain.

And the sense of that word “variant” causes problems of its own, for not all the variants given in a critical edition vary from the text in the same way. Most notably, a critical edition might

classify under that one name both differences between the manuscript and the text and differences between editions, arising from the vagaries of typesetting rather than from an authorial change of heart (these are rare in this edition, but see, for instance, page 1470 var. c and page 1473 var. c). The fact that two sorts of variants are identically presented, and under that single rubric of “variants,” suggests that they are somehow the same thing, yet one sort of variant is an unambiguous error and the other is not. Or at least might not be, for as we saw earlier on it is possible to see discarded manuscript material as something like a mistake with respect to the book itself—even Bellemin-Noël speaks of the revision of a text as an elimination of “intrusions” that mar “a certain thematic concordance” (102). In this way too, then, the edition cannot do otherwise than to muddy the status of the variant. Is it in the text? Is it the text? We’ve already asked these questions in chapter 2 of this book, and the edition gives us a kind of answer: yes and no, to each. I agree with that answer; nevertheless, I find it uncomfortably at odds with the edition’s goal to give us what must be *known* in order for the text to be itself.

Equally difficult is the problem of deciding what is and what is not a variant. Balzac’s manuscripts are famously peppered with calculations (how much money he owed, or was investing, or could soon expect to earn). Are these variants? Clearly not, because they’re not *close enough* to the text to enjoy that status. And yet they are there, a part of the manuscript of the work; on what grounds, in the end, can one decide that a given word written down on a manuscript but not appearing in the definitive draft is to be excluded from the list of variants, while another—also a word written down on the manuscript but not appearing in the definitive draft—is to be kept? The manuscripts of *Le chiendent* are full of doodles: are those variants? Why not, exactly? For that matter, think of any of the passages we looked at in chapter 2: are those variants? I’m not

sure how they can be said to *vary* from the text, if they describe events that never happened in the text. If they involve the same characters, then they will be assumed to have some relationship to the text, and will therefore be included in the critical edition somewhere (but again, not all of them, and not including all the variants within them); but if they involve characters (names) that do not appear in the book? And indeed, how do we know that the characters named by those names in the variant are in fact the same as the characters that bear those names in the book? (Let us recall that Eco's theory would appear to forbid them this status, however debatable that argument may seem.) Once again, I am speaking here about the necessity of editorial decisions in the elaboration of the critical edition, and there is no fault to be found with this necessity or with the individual decisions that any editor might have made; I am simply trying to point out that the manuscript escapes the control of the critical edition, that it is too labyrinthine, too multiple, too odd a document to let itself be juxtaposed with a basic text *simply* as that which varies from the text.

And then there is the impossibility of reproducing the variants. In this or any other critical edition, the work is presented in a smoothly readable form, whole and unified, while the variants are cast away somewhere, either to the bottom of the page or (in this case) to a separate section in the back, accessible only with some searching and much fumbling. In either case, the message is unmistakable: this is the work, and that is not. There is something to be done with these variants, but they can't really be presented as text, because apparently they aren't. The variants generally come in little shards rather than in blocks of text; if one word in a line is different in the manuscript than in the work, only that word is printed in the variants, rather than the line in which it was originally written, and certainly rather than the entire sentence or paragraph, with that one different word substituted for the word

that occurs in the definitive text. The reasons for this convention are readily understandable, but its effect is irksome, for it prevents the reader from truly reading the version containing the variant. We can only look back at the line as given in the definitive work, and mentally substitute the variant word for the legitimate one. A critical edition, then, presents the earlier wording as a discarded one, and allows it to exist only as such. Hence Bellemin-Noël's objection to the term "variant": "By using that term, we suggest, we oblige ourselves to assume, that there is *one* text with several different formulations, when in fact the only coherent approach is to posit the existence of *two* texts with every change" (12; emphasis in original). It's difficult to disagree; not only the word "variant" but also the variants' presentation deprives the discards of any real textual force of their own. But would it be possible *not* to mute the difference of a manuscript in this way? What would happen if we allowed that difference—even the minor sort of difference generally involved in such variants—to exist, to occupy a page in the same way that the text itself does? What if we actually allowed the text of the manuscripts to exist, to be a text?

Such was precisely the goal of Peter M. W. Robinson in his oversight of a digitization of the various versions of the *Canterbury Tales*. Robinson notes, rightly, that "there is far more variation within texts than can be conveyed by a standard critical apparatus" (104), meaning that the print-based critical apparatus cannot account for the effect of different hands in manuscript versions, and so on, but I believe that what he says is just as true even if we are dealing with manuscripts written by a single hand. Certainly the riot of different versions of scenes from Queneau's novel could not possibly be reproduced in textual form, simply for lack of space. There are variants, variants of variants, variants crossed out and not, scribbles that may have nothing to do with the text, and so forth. (In this sense, the creation of a critical edition is perhaps

just as impossible as some people feel translation to be.) Seeking to tame a similar welter of alternate versions, Robinson proposes a hypertextual catalog of the different manuscripts and printings of the *Canterbury Tales* as a solution to the shortcomings of the paper-and-ink critical edition. Any word of a given line can be clicked on, calling up a summary of the various manuscripts that contain that word, including variant spellings; each of those references can then be clicked on to call up a transcription of that line in that particular manuscript, and with another click the reader can see a photograph of that entire page in the manuscript (12). This method thus provides a multitude of texts of the *Canterbury Tales*, and a multitude of different ways of approaching that work: "each reader is free to find the one text they seek" (112). A fine idea, this, but here too, with these additions, there is a loss: a loss of the reader's right not to have to *seek* a text, but simply to be *given* one. Here Robinson echoes an idea common among the new bibliographers, "that editors and readers must forsake the search for the 'right' text and become cognizant instead of how theoretical, institutional, and social practices produce their different orientations" (Cohen xx, summarizing Peter Shillingsburg's *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*). Perhaps this is fair to editors, but is it really fair to readers? Why should it be our responsibility to decide which version of a text we are going to read, if all we really want is to read the text? Of course, we could simply read the "base text" (Robinson 108) that is the root of the hypertextual versions, but this only brings us back to the problem of the note numbers: given that you *can* click on any word and get the entire history of its use in this text, *why do you not do so?* The reading of the base text becomes simply a continual reminder that there is something we're not seeing, creating and imposing on the reader a loss. This seems somewhat unfair to me, but again, it cannot be otherwise. As soon as there is some form of critical edition of the text, the

text can no longer be read as it is read if there is no critical edition. There is, no matter how enlightening and revealing a critical edition might be, something *destructive* about its existence.

The mere inclusion of variants thus does something to the text, and to our reading of it (something that is not entirely constructive); but what the Queneau edition's treatment of variants shows is that even our understanding of those variants' sense or status can be undone by an attempt to offer them. While referring to all the unpublished material by a singular name (*parerga*, Queneau's preferred term for such pages, which interestingly means "preparatory material"), it divides it into two parts: on the one hand, a series of fairly long, more or less finished passages that Queneau abandoned for one reason or another (these have been gathered in the appendix that is associated with each of the eight novels in the volume); and on the other, a series of localized variants, reproduced chapter by chapter, just before that chapter's notes. (Let us recall that the appendices of the eight novels are printed together, after the novels themselves, and before the introductions, notes, and variants: the unpublished material is thus to be found not only under two different headings but in two different places within the volume.) The difference of status between these two sorts of fragments is not entirely clear. The fragments in the appendix are generally longer than those of the variants, but not always: several of the variant texts are just as long as some of the appendix texts (see, for instance, appendix 2 and variant b of chapter 4). Nor, it would seem, is it the content rather than the size that distinguishes the two categories, for certain of the appendix texts reproduce passages that depict actions very different from those that make up the finished novel (see, for instance, appendix 5), but so do some of the variants (see, for instance, variant a of chapter 1 or variant r of chapter 7). One of the appendix texts reprints a prior version of a monologue that does figure in the finished text (appendix 4),

while the variants include a different prior version of that same monologue (variant e of chapter 7). The only more or less consistent feature I can find is that all the unpublished material in the appendices (which is not to say all the appendices, since—to add to the complexity—they also include a published *prière d'insérer* from the first edition) is an *early* attempt, already abandoned by the time of the final manuscript or the proofs. For the most part (but not exclusively), the variant texts derive from later changes, either to a more or less final typescript or to the galleys.

Thus, it would seem that there is one necessary condition for a text's inclusion in the appendix: that the fragment come from an early draft of the novel. But what is the sufficient condition? Godard's general introduction does nothing to define it. He tells us only that the edition reproduces in their entirety "not all, but the greatest possible number, given the length planned for this volume, of those pages, sections, chapters, or parallel versions. Queneau sacrificed them, with the carefreeness of a quick writer . . . not necessarily because he found them weak (in some of these pages we find Queneau at his best), but because at some point in the process he decided to orient the novel in a different direction" (lxix). A bit further on, Godard touches very briefly on the distinction between those texts and the material found in the variants: "Given the existence of that unpublished material, the number of more localized variants [reproduced here] has been minimized, but careful consideration and systematic study was devoted to each of those choices" (lxx). Here, then, we can see the beginnings of a definition of the appendix material. They are relatively early texts, they represent a direction that the story could have taken but did not, they are "good" (more worthy of intact preservation than the variants), or at least they tell us something. Again, we might quibble, for there are passages among the variants that observe these same rules, and there are passages to be found in the

manuscripts not reproduced anywhere in the edition that do the same thing. We must assume, then, that for Godard the appendix texts are those that could not be sacrificed to the need to keep the volume relatively short, and the only ones, given that constraint, worthy of appearing in a form that is as readable as that of the text (not simply paraphrased, and not reproduced in the small-type, fragmentary form of the variants). They thus have a special status: they are more a part of the text than the variants—or are they? The variants are "present" in the text by way of the superscript letters, whereas the appendices are sequestered in their own sections, unannounced by any references in the text (although they are sometimes referred to in the notes and variants). This separation suggests a distinction between the appendix texts and the variants that is precisely like the distinction between allusions identified in the preface and in the notes; here too, the sense of that distinction eludes me.

A close study of the appendices only complicates things further, for even within this single rubric we find texts with a range of different statuses. The first appendix in the volume is devoted to "Technique du roman," an essay Queneau wrote after finishing his first three novels (and about those three novels); it was first published in the literary revue *Volontés* in 1937 and was reprinted in the two editions of *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* (1950 and 1965). This essay thus has a long record of publication, unlike any of the other texts in these appendices. Its inclusion among the appendices (or more precisely "as a preamble to these Appendices" [1237], despite the fact that it is in fact *in* the appendices) clearly marks it as a central, fundamentally important text for the comprehension of these novels. Which of course it is—but again, its inclusion here *makes* it a text that the reader really should read and apply to the novels. (In this context it is interesting to think of the experience of readers who read these books *before* this article appeared: did

no one know how to read Queneau properly between 1933 and 1937? Queneau himself says that these structural techniques went largely unnoticed at the time of the novels' publication, and interprets this to mean that their use "wasn't as arbitrary as all that" ["Conversation" 42]—but perhaps, sacrilegiously, we might just as well propose that it means their perception is not really essential to an appreciation of the novel, and even that, from one point of view, they aren't really all that important. The paperback edition *allows* them not to be important; the critical edition does not.) In any case, Godard himself clearly sees them as highly important; as he writes in a paragraph introducing "Technique du roman" and the two prior versions that follow it in the appendix, "On that subject of capital importance, each of [the two preliminary drafts] offers new insights" (1237). What this means, of course, is that these texts are fundamental elements of the story that the critical edition is trying to tell. But their placement in an appendix gives them a slightly uncertain status, as virtually everything else in *Le chiendent's* appendices derives from the novel's *avant-textes*. So should "Technique du roman" be given the same sort of status as the rest of the material in the appendix, or not? To be sure, the fact that this article is placed in the same section of the book as the unpublished material does not necessarily imply that we are meant to understand it in the same way as the rest, but clearly Godard fears that such an implication might be presumed by the reader: hence the need to tell us that "Technique du roman" appears as a preamble to the appendices, so as to separate it from the rest. The fact that it is not separated from the rest, even as Godard seeks to separate it, is perhaps the best illustration of the labyrinthine complexity that comes with every attempt to classify extratextual material in any coherent way.

The appendices themselves—that is, after the non-appendix that is "Technique du roman"—bear the general title "Appendices to

Le chiendent" and break down as follows. Appendix 1 (subtitled "Documents") contains a diagram drawn up by Queneau delineating the narrative mode of each of the novel's ninety-one sections (1247), then a similar diagram indicating the presence or absence of most of the novel's characters in chapter 7 (1248), and third a transcription (rather than a facsimile, as in the case of the first two) of a calendar drawn up by Queneau that situates the novel's events (up through the first sections of chapter 7) between the months of July and November (1249). Here end the "Documents," presumably; if so, then the following rubric has no name. Next comes appendix 2, the aborted monologue in which Saturnin reveals to an unnamed interlocutor that he is translating Descartes's *Discours* (1250). Appendix 3 reprints an abandoned conversation between Étienne and Pierre Le Grand's brother (1251–55); appendix 4 is an early version of Saturnin's drunken monologue from late in the novel (1255–57). Appendix 5 narrates the story of Le Grand's arrest and planned execution for espionage (1258–60), and appendix 6 provides six fragments laying out potential endings for the novel (1260–63). Finally, appendix 7, titled "Presentation Texts," offers the published *prière d'insérer*, possibly not written by Queneau, and the abandoned preface discussed in chapter 2 (1264–65).

This layout has much to interest us. For one thing, it is intriguing that the first and last appendices, unlike the others, are fitted with titles that tell us what they are: "Documents" in the first case, "Presentation Texts" in the last. Oddly, this latter title is printed between brackets, which would appear to imply that the status of the latter rubric is less certain than that of the former. This is entirely explicable, in that the texts titled "Documents" confirm something said in "Technique du roman," in the first two cases, and something said in *Queneau déchiffré*, a fundamental critical work on Queneau, in the third (see Simonnet 168–82). Those documents have a *force*; we can see them at work in the

book. The presentation texts, on the other hand, are never alluded to in Queneau's writings. One might not have been written by him, while the other, the aborted preface, was never finished (and in fact seems to contradict the official truth of *Le chiendent's* structure as promulgated in "Technique du roman"). They are thus not "authorized," and so have a status less real than that of the documents; and so, perhaps, they are placed under a bracketed title, like the abandoned episodes that are reprinted before them. Nevertheless, these presentation texts are at least *more* specifiable than most of the abandoned episodes, as they can be, like the documents, collectively classified under a title that tells us what kind of texts they are.

In certain cases this is true of the abandoned episodes as well, but not to the same degree, as the title "Presentation Texts" introduces two very different sorts of texts that can nevertheless be grouped under a single rubric, which the abandoned episodes apparently cannot be. Rather, each one is endowed with its *own* title: they can be classified according to their own content, but they cannot be classified *as a group*, as a series of texts with a nameable function. Again, manuscript material explicitly eludes classification, as is further evidenced by the titles—always bracketed—given to those abandoned episodes. Three of them bear a title that names the sort of text they constitute, what Genette calls a "rhematic" title (see *Seuils* 75–76): "Earlier version of Saturnin's drunken monologue" (1255), "Earlier versions of the novel's last lines" (1260), and "Metaphysical discussion between Michel, Pierre's mathematician brother, and Étienne" (1251). These titles tell us that the text that follows can be described, defined, fit into a logically perceptible category, of which the notion of the kind of text it is (a previous version, a metaphysical discussion) is the defining characteristic, although even within this unified category there is a disunity: the first two titles present the text quite explic-

itly as an *avant-texte*, the third does not (does the fact that a given scene was not rewritten in the novel but abandoned change something about it? The titles would suggest so, but what?). And then there are two "thematic" titles, as Genette would say, titles that present the event as an event rather than as a certain type of narrative: "Saturnin translates [or is translating: *traduit*] the *Discours de la méthode*" (1250) and "Pierre Le Grand about to be shot as a spy" (1258).

I find it curious that these last two pseudo-titles do not name the genre to which their text belongs, as the others do; it would, after all, have been possible to entitle the first of the two passages "Saturnin's monologue on Descartes" and the second "Abandoned episode of the arrest of Pierre Le Grand," or something along those lines. Genette writes that there is in the end no functional distinction to be made between a rhematic and a thematic title (*Seuils* 85), but, seeing these two different sorts of title applied to precisely the same sorts of text (all *avant-texte*), I'm not convinced. At the very least, the thematic titles confer an exceptional status on those two passages, suggesting that they are somehow less definable than the others. The titles thus implicitly pose a question we have already considered here at great length: is an abandoned episode a text in which something happens, or one that can only be described as belonging to a certain sort of discourse? The two different sorts of titles given to the appendix texts suggest that the answer could be one or the other. Sometimes a manuscript passage can be tamed, so to speak, by giving it a title like "Earlier version of . . .," which quite clearly tells us which text has the force of reality and which does not, since the text in the appendix is only a prior version of the other. But the other sort of title suggests that such a text might also have a certain unstoppable reality of its own, as if its events actually happen, as if the only way to define it is by describing those events. In short, these titles suggest that the

question of the truth-value or "happeningness" of unpublished material really is, as we found in the chapter on manuscripts, an unanswerable one, that material can easily have either of the two statuses, perhaps even both at once, and the relationship between those two statuses is at best highly fluid.

But there is more to be said here. Note the difference between the two titles: if "Pierre Le Grand about to be shot as a spy" still implies a certain, very slight distance on the part of the reader (it is perhaps an elliptical form of "[A passage in which we find] Pierre Le Grand about to be shot as a spy," which allows us to consider it as a certain kind of narrative above all else, and so to strip it, however partially, of its fictive force), the other title is more refractory. It cannot be expanded in precisely the manner indicated above, unless it be in a form like "[A passage in which we find that] Saturnin is translating the *Discours de la méthode*." The "that" in the second bracketed insertion is made necessary by the present-tense verb in the second title (note the absence of a similar verb in the first title), a verb whose sense is perversely difficult to pin down: should we understand it as "translates" or "is translating"? The former suggests that the passage will show him translating it, which is not exactly the case (although Saturnin does cite one sentence from his translation); the latter names an action or a state (or an action that is a state) in the context of which his words are spoken. This seems the better choice. Very well, then: Saturnin is translating the *Discours*. That is a reality that is true in the passage, and its reality is not diminished by the title, leading us to conclude that in this appendix Saturnin's translating the *Discours* is to some extent a *real* action. In fact, of course, it is no more real than any of the other discarded passages, but Godard's wording implies something we have already described about manuscript passages: they are real and not real at the same time, and there's no way to reduce that dual truth to a singular one.

But we have not yet finished considering the question of the different statuses of the texts included in the appendices. Because they are all grouped together, we can assume that they all relate to the text of the novel in the same way, but they don't. In the definitive text, Saturnin is not translating the *Discours* (not exactly, at least), Étienne never discusses mathematics with Pierre's brother, Pierre is never arrested for espionage (as far as we know!), and the novel does not end in the manner proposed by the planned denouements sketched out in appendix 6. Saturnin's drunken monologue (appendix 4), on the other hand, *does* happen in the novel, though not exactly in this form: that appendix thus has a slightly different status from the others. The "Documents," with a few minor differences, do indeed correspond to the events of the novel, however: the reality they depict is still going on in the text. As for the real *prière d'insérer*, it applies to the text as much today as it ever did, and in the end the same is true of the unfinished preface, though perhaps it never did apply to the text in quite the way that "Technique du roman" does. Their grouping together in the appendices suggests that all those different sorts of texts are to be taken in more or less the same way, and that they all have more or less the same relationship with the novel, which is partially true (they are all texts that exist around or outside the novel, and that are by one definition not in the novel) and partially false (they apply to the text in a variety of ways, direct and tangential, real and potential). Here again, the critical edition's rational, carefully considered approach to the reproduction of *avant-texte* material serves above all to show the implacable intractability of that material, its stubborn refusal to fit into any easy definition and any easy relationship with the work to which it does or does not belong, the impossibility of including it in a critical edition without demolishing the very knowledge that the edition is meant to offer us.

But in addition to the difficulty of choosing and categorizing

these non-text texts, there is the problem of what we are to do with them. The Pléiade edition is adamantly reticent on this point; as we saw earlier, it tells us how to read the text to some extent, but it does not tell us how to read the variants, and in this it further expresses and reinforces the ambiguity of their status (the text requires context, the variants don't: but why not?). Often it would appear that the variants are there to confirm our idea of what the text is supposed to be; thus, the indication of the switch from "ainsi à" to the casually phonetic "zinsiza" in the galleys (1470 var. a) is presumably meant to suggest Queneau's conscious attempt to mine the comic, defamiliarizing effect of the transcription of oral French, just as the deletion of punctuation in the two interior-monologue passages (1470 var. e; 1471 var. a) demonstrates the influence of James Joyce alluded to in Godard's introduction to *Le chiendent* (1451). We know that such things (neo-French and intertextuality) are important in Queneau's writing and in this novel, and so the edition seeks to show us, by way of the variants, how these aspects of the writing came to be in the final text. At other times, the passages seem to have been included solely for the reader's and the editor's delight, such as variants f, g, and h of chapter 4 (1473), which offer three more of the hilarious parodies of small-town newspaper articles that end the account of Étienne's vacation at X...; but never, or very rarely, does Godard suggest a reason why these changes are being brought to our attention: once again we see that strange split personality of the critical edition, offering us material on the implicit grounds that we should care about it, forcing us to care about it by offering it, and at the same time scrupulously avoiding any definition of its necessity. In one case he tells us that a previous version "gave a different orientation to the narrator's intervention" (1468 var. b), in another that the earlier draft "was less metaphysical" than the published passage (1474 var. c). At times, then, he notes a difference, while at others

he merely implies one, as in this introduction to appendix 4: "In this version of [Saturnin's] monologue . . . which may be compared to the published version . . . Saturnin confesses to being the author of the novel that the reader is reading" (1255). What interests me here is the phrase "which may be compared with [que l'on pourra comparer avec]," so oddly ambiguous in its sense. If Godard gives us that passage, presumably we *should* compare it to the published version, but he seems unwilling to go that far: we simply *may*. And if we do, presumably we will discover something, but again Godard refrains from telling us what. For my part, I sense a kind of meaning behind that ambiguity, a simultaneous acknowledgment of the truth or force of an abandoned passage and a reluctance to allow that force to exist, or else—but it comes to much the same thing—an acknowledgment that it is better to know more about a text than to know less, and a simultaneous hesitation to say what knowing more might do for us, or to our reading.

But there is one way in which Godard's interventions do discreetly suggest how we might best read the variants, for when he alludes to the relative qualities of a variant and the definitive draft, he almost inevitably suggests that the latter is superior, even if he does so from Queneau's point of view rather than his own (thus speaking of the improvement without seeming to). He explains at considerable length, as if to show the validity of its reasoning, Queneau's decision to remove a handful of Latin epigraphs from the text, concluding that their use no doubt "appeared to Queneau, on reflection, superfluous" (1451). Similarly, speaking of the deletion of Étienne's conversation with Pierre Le Grand's brother, he writes: "no doubt the character [of Pierre's brother] seemed to him, on reflection, too peripheral, and his lecture too tacked-on. He thus eliminates the chapter that contains that discussion, but does not discard its content: it will later be used in *Odile*" (xlv). It's difficult to know what exactly Godard means by "tacked-on"

and "superfluous" here, given that this sort of overt artificiality and gratuitousness is an omnipresent feature of *Le chiendent* (see, for instance, Narcense's daydream [117-21] or the newspaper clippings [137-40], or for that matter Pierre and Étienne's metaphysical discussion [104-6]) and, I would think, an important element of the destruction of novelistic illusion that Godard sees as crucial to Queneau's aesthetic or ethos (with Queneau there's no real difference). The explanation that the character of Pierre's brother is perhaps too peripheral to merit such a long monologue—or to appear in the novel at all—seems equally shaky. He's really no more peripheral than, say, Shibolet, who is given a long monologue in chapter 4, and in any case the inclusion of this speech would ipso facto make Le Grand's brother *less* peripheral. It is in the definitive novel that Le Grand's brother is peripheral; Queneau chose not to rid the novel of a peripheral character but to make of a somewhat peripheral character an entirely peripheral one. On the other hand, I can readily imagine myself agreeing that the speech delivered by Le Grand's brother, like the epigraphs, might strike some readers as somewhat artificially inserted, slightly sententious and expressing too overtly a point that the reader is supposed to get (even though I admit that I find the mathematician's speech entirely fascinating, and in fact more fascinating than its reworked version in *Odile*). But even as I think these things, I can't help wondering why I think them—if I would not, had I actually encountered that passage in *Le chiendent*, find them a perfectly motivated central still point in the text (it would logically come exactly halfway through the book, in the middle of the novel's becalmed fourth chapter), and even as a key to the understanding of the novel (the monologue describes quiet, perhaps invisible but nonetheless real harmonies of the very sort that underlie the construction of this book), just as I wonder if I don't find it more

fascinating than Travy's speech in *Odile* precisely because it is *not* part of a definitive text.

Once again, I in no way intend to place Godard's analysis in doubt. If one is going to discuss the reasons for which an author chose to drop or alter a certain scene, then one must come up with a motivation for that change, and Godard's seems to me entirely sensible and convincing. But the fact is that any such motivation can only, like Godard's, found itself in an understanding of the form of the definitive text, and see the (praiseworthy) reason for the change as nothing other than bringing the text into conformity with what it currently is.

I can hear this lauding of the text's published form as the best form even when Godard does not make it explicit. Speaking of an emendation made to the order of the last two sections of chapter 2, he writes that "the result is to render the structure of the novel more visible" (1450); a little further on, referring to Queneau's decision, at the proof stage, to italicize the thirteenth section of each of the book's six chapters and to affix the number XCI to the thirteenth section of the last, Godard writes: "Queneau thus introduced, at a later date, so as to be sure that they would not escape the reader's attention, the two most visible marks of the novel's structuration" (1450). Here there is no explicit indication that we are to see these changes as improvements, but surely we're not meant to find anything *destructive* in them. It's odd, though: if Michel Le Grand's monologue seems overly "tacked-on," why can the same not be said of the explicit display of the number XCI in the final section—which, like many other occurrences of that number, was indeed stuck into the text late in its development? Where exactly is the difference? Once again, the difference seems to be that the passages Godard implicitly criticizes were removed, and these other features, which he implicitly praises, were added:

had Queneau dropped the italics and the number XCI, I can well imagine an editor praising Queneau for having deleted features that made the structure *too* obvious (Godard does precisely that with reference to Queneau's reworking of his novel *Les derniers jours* [lxii]). How can we judge the worthiness of a textual alteration with any real objectivity when it is the text that defines what the text is?

Rarely—exactly once, by my count—Godard suggests a flaw in the text as it stands, but this judgment seems to me as uncertain as any other. At the very end of the novel, hoping to convince Mme Cloche to erase all the events that have taken place so far, Saturnin enjoins her: "Wipe out everything I'm telling you" (246). Here Godard's note reads: "Wipe out everything, I'm telling you" would be more satisfying" (1481 n. 28). Barbara Wright would seem to agree, translating this line as "Rub it all out, I tell you" (WG 310). Now, I see Godard's and Wright's point about this putative lapsus, and yet I wonder what makes them so sure. I've played this little game before in these pages, arguing that the less plausible interpretation is just as credible as the other, but once again: why should this line not mean that Saturnin wants Cloche to erase the present moment along with the past—to erase everything up to and including the line he is then speaking? If that's what Queneau means him to be saying, then surely that meaning is more "satisfying." Indeed, if this is truly the sense of the line, it might be a deeply meaningful one: perhaps "everything I'm telling you" is nothing other than the novel itself. Saturnin comes close at one point to hinting that he is that author of the book he appears in (233), and one of the novel's abandoned endings would seem (albeit not explicitly) to reinforce this idea (see OC 2: 1263, appendix 6 d). Perhaps, then, what he's "telling her" is precisely this book. It's true that Cloche believes the book is recording their acts rather than creating them, but perhaps Saturnin, as an

author, doesn't agree. Or else—once you begin interpreting, it's hard to stop—since Saturnin has been speaking oddly (stuttering, mispronouncing words) throughout this final scene, how to know that this ambiguous slip is not simply another in that series of lapses, and thus perfectly "satisfying"? We can't know any of that, of course, and I certainly don't want to suggest that Godard's evaluation is wrong. What I do want to say here is that it seems to me just as risky, just as uncertain, just as potentially unfounded to call the text imperfect as it is to call it perfect. I absolutely believe that in a written text one form can be better than another—who could possibly disagree? But the more I think about it, the more powerfully the lesson I attributed to translation imposes itself: in all honesty, I don't know how to see the difference between better and worse.

This is, I think, precisely the point of a passage in *Le chiendent* itself that shows us the very act under discussion: an author revising a passage from an earlier draft of his work. Sitting in the train on his way to stop the hanging of Théo Marcel, Saturnin muses on his book in progress and jots down the following addendum: "As an epigraph, put this: Descartes; you have to wonder why, in cafés, cardplayers so often call the waiter by that name." He then thinks a moment longer, strikes out what he has just written, and replaces it with "You have to wonder why, in cafés, cardplayers so often call the waiter Descartes." And then, in a final emendation, "He replaces *so often* with *always*" (53; italics in original). We might well wonder just what Queneau is trying to tell us with this little passage. To be sure, he is showing us a conscientious writer, one who, like himself, believes in writing as work rather than as inspiration, but I have a hard time seeing this simply as an edifying little scene held up for the reader's admiration; I have difficulty, that is, not hearing a slightly acerbic tone behind those lines, as if Queneau were at once showing us an author improving his work

and urging us to wonder why exactly this constitutes an improvement. Is the second version really "better," whatever that means, than the first? It's hard to see why we must conclude that it is; if anything, it seems less accurate ("so often" becomes "always"). Saturnin's contented smile is thus the reaction of someone who believes he has done a bit of worthwhile work but who has perhaps not, and Queneau may be suggesting here that revision does not necessarily lead to improvement (a sense that would correspond very nicely to the novel's decidedly dim view of positivism in general). For Saturnin, of course, it does. This edition seems to agree, but there's absolutely nothing unusual about that: the same belief seems to found the vast majority of discussions of such issues in critical editions and genetic studies.

There are more examples of this phenomenon than I could possibly hope to cite here; no doubt the reader is already aware of many, so I will simply quote a few representative instances, far less discreet than Godard's, and far more sure of themselves. Speaking of Joyce's revisions to the "sprawling fat manuscript which finally became the lean, pure *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*," Wayne Booth notes the frequency with which Joyce expunges narratorial commentary; thus, "Having once written, 'Stephen stuck his spoon angrily through the bottom of the [egg] shell,' he reconsidered and crayoned out 'angrily.' Why? Because it was clearly the author refusing to let the natural, the pure object—in this case a physical action—speak for itself" (97). Discussing Joseph Heller's revisions to *Catch-22*, James Nagel writes that "Mrs. Scheisskopf gets more attention in the manuscripts than in the published version. Much of what was cut about her, however, contained generalized comments about women that would have introduced tangential issues, and Heller wisely deleted them" (287). Nagel also considers the deletion of a passage that would have suggested that Yossarian posed a "dangerous threat" to those around him, by having

him shoot a box of skeet out of Appleby's hands; this too was a wise deletion, he says, because "In the final version [Yossarian] is essentially a life-affirming character fighting for survival in a hostile and threatening world" (285). Studying Virginia Woolf's revisions to a key passage in *The Voyage Out*, James Haule affirms that "This scene in the published version is more powerful because it becomes translucent. The clarity of the scene as it exists in the drafts is obscured in the published version. Fact is replaced by image. The result is unsettling. Yet the published version is a far more effective evocation of dislocation, confusion, asphyxiating fear, and eroticism" (318).

I would never dare to claim that any of these arguments are faulty, simplistic, or wrong; I simply wonder about the certainty they suggest, for once again the standard of quality by which the altered material is judged is determined by nothing other than the text itself. They see the altered or deleted passages as inferior simply because they do not conform to what the text itself is. Of course, those who use this approach never state this assumption. They find what appear to be perfectly objective reasons why the definitive text is better, but I am convinced that their objectivity is founded in nothing other than the nature of the finished text itself. It is better for Virginia Woolf to describe this scene in the "translucent" manner because that is what the text does, and therefore that is what the text is supposed to do. It is better for Yossarian to display no (playful) aggression because in the novel he does not. It is better to leave out the "angrily" because Joyce's book does more showing than telling. Ipso facto, any passage that does not do what the text does is a failed version of which the text is the true version.

Reasoning like this brings us back to the notion of the text proposed in the first pages of this book: as a singular unit (certain words in a certain order), unalterable (any other version would not

have been as good, cannot be the book itself). Godard states this far less presumptuously than the three critics I've just cited, but the thinking, to my mind, is the same. The book itself has a way of coming back, of asserting its authority; oddly, it does so even if one takes the position, as Herschel Parker does in *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons*, that the published version is in fact *not* better than some previous draft of it. The truest text of *The Red Badge of Courage*, he writes, is not the one we usually read under that title, but one that must be reconstituted from Crane's manuscripts, for unlike the published volume, "the manuscript does represent, in all important respects, Crane's original intention, which is the only intention to possess artistic finality" (174). There's something bracing about Parker's distrust of the printed word of the "definitive" text, but in the end he is no less in thrall to the author's *words* than Nagel or Booth. That is, if we don't see the published volume as necessarily the best possible version of the book, why should we assume that a manuscript could be? If what we're after is an original intention, I find something dubious in the assumption that any particular set of written words will necessarily reflect it. Perhaps there is no written version anywhere that expresses everything the novel could have been, nor everything the author intended. But of course Parker cannot reconstruct a novel based on anything other than words that the author did write at some point; he is in spite of everything dependent on a text—by its nature potentially flawed—in his search for a text that is not flawed. Parker's goal is to throw off the authority of the printed word, but even in so doing he is limited by nothing other than a text. No matter which way we turn, there is a book—a book itself—imposing its own existence as the only true one. The fact that this book itself also lends itself so easily to addition, to alteration, to reproduction, changes nothing: that's simply another aspect of its existence, not contradicting the first, but only accompanying it.

The critical edition demonstrates this truth as well as any other other book. Its role is to add to the text, and it does so, while at the same time expressing a certain reluctance to do so. It seeks to make clear what we must know to understand the text, and offers that certain knowledge only as chaos. It gives us the history of the text, and simultaneously hides it. No less than the manuscript or the translation, the critical edition is not really the text itself, and yet, insistently, it points back to the text itself as the only thing the text can be. The closer we look at the other book, the more entirely we find that the very openness that it allows only reinforces the closedness of the text. At the same time, the closer we look at the other book, the less we understand the nature of and our reading of the text itself. Here, then, is the final lesson of this or any other critical edition: the more you know, the less you know. And that, not coincidentally, might also be one of the great lessons of *Le chiendent*.

CONCLUSION

WHAT I'VE SAID HERE CHANGES NOTHING, of course. Tomorrow I will pick up a novel and begin to read, and no matter how full my head of the uncertainties I've just laid out, I will read exactly as I always have, never doubting the perfect knowability of the thing I have before me. You will do the same, if you're lucky enough to pick up a novel tomorrow. Throughout this book I've been arguing that fiction is at once open and closed, solid and liquid, but I should add that it needn't in any way matter if it's a solid or a liquid or both. Fiction resists definition, I've been claiming, to which I should add that it resists *my* definition no less than anyone else's. Say what you like about the nature of fiction, but never forget that no matter what you say, fiction will always escape your grasp, as it escapes mine. Call a novel a force, and it reasserts itself as an object; call it a solid, and it stubbornly reveals itself as a liquid. And no matter what you call it, it goes on doing its mysterious work as if you'd never opened your mouth at all.

No doubt this was all once much simpler. Before the advent of print, I imagine, we accepted the fluidity of stories as a matter of course; a tale could be told and retold in a thousand ways, and there was nothing disturbing about it—although I wonder just how much liberty a

medieval *jongleur* really had to rework the well-known tale he or she was reciting, and I assume that it was a *limited* liberty. But once books began to be printed—and particularly once copyright law was established—a story became conflated with the specific words used to narrate it. And with this conflation comes, paradoxically, a sort of scission: the book is now partly events or ideas and partly words, partly a force and partly an object, and—barring the (I dearly hope) unlikely possibility that print culture might one day vanish forever—there is no turning back.

That scission happened, I would venture to guess, without our really knowing it, without our thinking about it. In its earliest days, print must have been thought of simply as a means of making the ephemeral permanent, of recording speech or something very like speech, on the model of the manuscripts that preceded it. Soon people began to write books specifically for the purpose of being printed, but I don't think anything changed at that point: the printed page remains essentially a recording of something (as Bateson, well into the fifth century of print's existence, explicitly tells us). This isn't always true, of course—no one would claim that *Finnegans Wake* or *Un coup de dés* is a reproduction of something spoken—but it remains a kind of default model for our approach to a text (hence the use of the word "voice" to describe an author's individual style). But at the same time, print, and particularly copyright, enforce a recasting of the book's nature, making of the words of the text not simply a recording of something, but something in themselves. The collection of words becomes an object, and with this comes the possibility and indeed the inevitability of the other book, for that object—ownable, breakable, reproducible—is now at least in part something other than the tale itself.

In other words, we started out simply telling stories, and then at some point our stories began to exist independently of their tellers or their telling—to exist independently of *us*, to (as I hope to have shown here) escape our attempts to define or delimit or tame them.

This is not the sign of a failing on our part, not a reminder that we have to find some better way of defining or delimiting literature. It is rather a glimpse of an extraordinary truth: in literature, we invented a thing whose workings we cannot exactly grasp. We might not much like that idea—for very good reasons, our brains are fixated on knowing and knowability—but if we can simply accept it, we might find something else dear to the human mind and heart: beautiful, impossible mystery.

For much of the twentieth century, from New Criticism to structuralism to poststructuralism and beyond, literary criticism and theory has seen its mission as a kind of demystification of literature: as a laying-bare, perhaps as a pseudo-mathematization, sometimes as an undoing, or even an undermining. My admiration for the critics who have undertaken this task, my affection for and faith in their ideas, knows no bounds. At the same time, I sometimes wonder why anyone would *want* to demystify literature, or at least why anyone would see that as the critical reader's highest aspiration. Literature is always a mystification: it forces us to believe things we know not to be real, to invest ourselves in emotions and events we know (but, thankfully, often forget) to be pure fabrication. Absent that mystification, reading would be impossible, and life would thus be unbearable. I'm all in favor of demystification, in other words, but also of its opposite. Think of this book, then, as an attempt at a remystification.

Because fiction *is* mystifying, and even mysterious, as soon as we try to define it. Some sixty years ago, Northrop Frye complained that we have found no real way of distinguishing prose from poetry (47). We still haven't, of course, nor will we. More recently, in *The Death of Literature*, Alvin Kernan seems to find something risible in the failed attempts of various noteworthy critics to define literature in the context of the *Lady Chatterley* trial, ultimately blaming our "inability to explain what literature is" for everything from the rise of literary theory to the decline

in English department enrollments (59). We still haven't defined literature, of course, nor will we. More recently yet, James Wood has written a book promising to explain *How Fiction Works*. It does no such thing, of course, nor could it have. Letting its workings be explained is not how fiction works. People go on trying to distinguish and define and explain, though, and they're certainly not wrong to do so: there must indeed be a distinction between poetry and prose, a definition of literature, an explanation of how fiction works. That thing has to exist, and I am convinced we will never find it. And I am delighted to say it, because to my mind there's something perfectly wonderful in our impotence. I am delighted to be mystified by literature, delighted to accept my inability to answer certain questions that can't be answered, not only because those questions offer me such a fine puzzle, but also because they show us something truly remarkable about the human capacity for creation. We invented literature, and we don't know what it is. Some may find that a scandal; if you ask me, it's a miracle.

A book can be known, of course—certain words in a certain order, and so on—but as soon as we know that, the other book comes along and undoes our assurance. A book can be unknown—translation, the manuscripts—but even as we unknow it the book itself is still there in the background, asserting its own authority. This is why I've structured this book as I have, with the two outer chapters insisting above all on the book's solidity, and the two inner chapters underscoring its porousness: the one penetrates the other, or the one encloses the other, take your pick. "Don't you think that nothingness absorbs being?" Saturnin asks Étienne toward the end of *Le chiendent*. The reply: "Isn't it rather being that conjugates nothingness?" (OC 2: 238). To both I say: yes indeed. Whence the only conceivable conclusion: in books as in everything else, the truth will always be somewhere other than where we think we find it.

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